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ARISTOTLE ON THE ART OF POETRY



# ARISTOTLE

## ON THE ART OF POETRY

AN AMPLIFIED VERSION WITH  
SUPPLEMENTARY ILLUSTRATIONS

*Revised Edition*

By LANE COOPER

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AND LITERATURE IN CORNELL UNIVERSITY

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TO THE MEMORY OF ALBERT S. COOK

PROFESSOR OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
AND LITERATURE IN YALE UNIVERSITY  
WHO RENDERED INESTIMABLE SERVICES TO  
HIS NATION IN PROMOTING THE CULTIVATION OF  
POETRY AND SOUND LEARNING



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## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

This amplified rendering of the *Poetics* of Aristotle, I hope, will be useful to the student of literature in general, and perhaps not without suggestion even to scholars in the ancient classics. Primarily, however, it is designed for certain students of English that I meet with, who are capable of deriving profit from the substance of the treatise, but gain less on a first acquaintance with it in any modern translation than their efforts commonly deserve. Accordingly, my chief aim has been to make the subject-matter of the work as intelligible as I thought it could be made for a first perusal by a kind of reader whose difficulties and initial mistakes I have come to know as a teacher of English. To this end I have employed a number of expedients, some of which may need a word of explanation. First of all, then, the original text has here been divided and expanded.

The *Poetics* as it has come down to us may represent a part of Aristotle's notes for a set of lectures, or perhaps for a dialogue; though now and then it seems more like the uneven memoranda of some person who attended the lectures. However this may be, and apart from any difficulties inherent in the subject, the treatise does not furnish easy reading. Superficially, it has the look of a continuous discourse without much articulation in the parts; it is divided into chapters, to be sure, yet in such a way that transitions in the thought are not always obvious. Of the

special topics, again, though some are carefully expounded and amply illustrated, others are dismissed with a sentence or two. In particular, the citations and other illustrations occasionally amount to the barest jottings, as 'Here is an example from the Bath Scene'—the example not being added. When the illustrative matter only adds to the darkness of an abstract principle, how great is that darkness! The present version aims to indicate the chief divisions unmistakably, and, by a running marginal gloss and certain interpolations, the lesser divisions and transitions as well; to render many of the examples less enigmatical; and, in short, without seriously distorting the perspective of the original, to supply such information as may be needed at the moment for a better, if not a complete and final, understanding of the individual thoughts and their sequence.

The reader that I have in mind may not be very systematic in the use of scholarly apparatus; he might even neglect the assistance of a foot-note. In order to perform my intended office for him, I have not scrupled to expand the wording in passages where, if unalert, he might otherwise advance too quickly. Far from hoping to rival the excellent terseness of Bywater's translation, or the smoothness (sometimes deceptive) of Butcher's, I have generally been willing to delay the reader at the risk of circumlocution, or by explicit repetition of a thought which is implicitly carried along in the Greek, and have even dared to interrupt the sequence by comments, long or short, where my students in the past have gone astray. In this way, for example, the unwary will not at the outset miss the emphasis one ought to lay upon the tragic *catharsis* or the tragic *hamartia*; and certain misconceptions that frequently arise during the first perusal of the treatise, and



tend to become rooted impressions, may likewise be avoided—for instance, the common misunderstanding of what Aristotle says on the relative importance of ‘character’ and ‘plot.’ On the other hand, no point has been made of calling attention to discrepancies in the *Poetics*, except where they are particularly troublesome; still, not all of the minor ones have been passed over in silence.

Furthermore, an attempt has been made to suggest that the principles of Aristotle have a wider application than his own illustrations, drawn solely from Greek literature, may serve to reveal; and not only the main principles, but some of the lesser as well. It is proper, of course, to observe that his ideal of perfect tragedy is not independent of the traditions of the Attic drama, or of local usage on the stage of his own day. At the same time, it is the experience of those who concern themselves with the *Poetics* that, allowance being made for the tentative method underlying certain of its apparently hard and fast conclusions, the treatise gains new significance for the student of modern literature with every re-examination. It seems desirable that the possibility of this wider application should, so to speak, be discovered from the first. I have therefore introduced sundry illustrations from familiar sources, chiefly English, which may do away with any pre-supposition that the work can have no bearing, say, upon the modern ‘romantic’ drama. For example, Aristotle holds that to be on the verge of committing a deed of horror knowingly, and yet to refrain, makes an undesirable situation in tragedy. His reasons may or may not seem cogent at first glance; but the situation itself can be illustrated as well by the instance of Hubert and Arthur in *King John* as by that of Haemon and Creon in *Antigone*; probably it is illustrated in *Hamlet*. My supplementary examples

could readily be multiplied, but that would distend the translation, and might not leave enough to the ingenuity of the reader. Doubtless some of them could be replaced to advantage; I can only say that in supplying examples I have tried to work in the spirit of the original, where the illustrative matter is simple and direct rather than always meticulously precise.

My additions are more extensive in the earlier part of the work, and decrease toward the close. I cannot hope that their tone, or style, will please the more experienced student of the *Poetics*; but it will not disturb the reader that I specially have in mind, for whose sake the additions have been printed in the same kind of types as the rest of the translation. It would be easy, on a second reading, to skip most of the interpolations, for the longer ones have all been enclosed in brackets, and the shorter ones also, when they interrupt the thought rather than help the reader on. Sometimes, as here and there in Chapter 25, it would be hard to draw the line between such liberties as a translator ordinarily may take in filling out the sense of his interpretation and the liberties I have wished to take for the execution of a special purpose. In passages where the first person singular of the original has been avoided (and as applying to Aristotle it has been avoided throughout), and in paragraphs or sentences where things implicit from a preceding paragraph or sentence have been repeated, the use of brackets would generally interfere with the clearness or fluency which the changes from the original are intended to promote. My use of parentheses varies.

It may not be improper to say that the notion of thus interpreting the *Poetics* may fairly be called my own; for I had examined neither Goulston nor Castelvetro before

I finished translating, and had no nearer prototype in mind than Dryden, or Pope, or Byron, in their adaptations of the treatises on poetry by Horace and Boileau, or Vida and Boileau in their adaptations of Horace. Needless to remark, I have not essayed the task of a poet like Dryden or Boileau, though I may have wished to do in a humble fashion for Aristotle what Hookham Frere so brilliantly accomplished for Aristophanes.

Being a student of English, with only a general training in Greek, I have made liberal use of the means of interpretation which the taste and industry of specialists on Aristotle have provided. These means, including the contributions of Vahlen, I have regarded as virtually selected and assembled for me in the masterly edition of the *Poetics* by Professor Bywater (Clarendon Press, 1909), from whose conception of the text I have but seldom intentionally departed (and then in favor of traditional readings), and whose notes and translation I have steadily consulted. Sometimes—not too often, I hope—where he has found the inevitable English equivalent of a word or phrase in the Greek, I have followed his rendering. Here and there I have borrowed also from the version of Professor Margoliouth—more rarely from that of Butcher—or sought help in the Latin of Tyrwhitt. In elucidating Chapter 25, I have availed myself of the analysis in the dissertation by Dr. Carroll. The example from Burke which is inserted in Chapter 17 was suggested by Professor Herbert Richards in the *Classical Review* for May, 1910; in fact, I have tried to profit by several reviews of Bywater's edition.

Certain other matters, textual and the like, which are not suitable for discussion here, I hope to treat of later in a separate article. For the present, two of them may be briefly mentioned. If my version of the passage and its

context is correct, Bywater's suggested transposition of four lines in Chapter 18 (his most considerable change in the text of the *Poetics*) is unwarranted. The presumption, of course, is in favor of the traditional sequence, and I am inclined to think my interpretation of the sequence unassailable.

As for the tale of Mitys' statue in Chapter 9, I have rendered the passage in accordance with Aristotle's use of the verb *θεωρεῖν*, and especially with his use of it in this treatise, disregarding the similar story in Plutarch, with the light it has been supposed to shed on the meaning of a word in the *Poetics*. I take this to be the widely disseminated tale, which appears in many variant forms (for example, Molière's *Don Juan, ou le Festin de Pierre*), of the murder avenged by the statue of the victim.

It only remains for me to record my sense of indebtedness to several of my friends and pupils who have aided and encouraged me in the prosecution of this work; and in particular to my colleagues Professor Joseph Q. Adams, Professor Horace L. Jones, and Professor Frank Thilly, through whose taste and caution I have avoided a number of infelicities, and it may be of positive errors.

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The main alterations in the present, revised, edition are indicated at the end of the Introduction, pp. xxviii-xxix.

L. C.

*Ithaca, July, 1946.*



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# INTRODUCTION

## CHARACTER AND VALUE OF THE POETICS

Without Art, Nature can ne'er be perfect; and without Nature, Art can claim no being. But our poet must beware that his study be not only to learn of himself; for he that shall affect to do that confesseth his ever having a fool to his master. He must read many, but ever the best and choicest: those that can teach him anything he must ever account his masters and reverence; among whom Horace and (he that taught him) Aristotle deserved to be the first in estimation. Aristotle was the first accurate critic and truest judge—nay, the greatest philosopher the world ever had; for he noted the vices of all knowledges, in all creatures, and out of many men's perfections in a science he formed still one Art. So he taught us two offices together: how we ought to judge rightly of others, and what we ought to imitate specially in ourselves. But all this in vain without a natural wit, and a poetical nature in chief; for no man so soon as he knows this, or reads it, shall be able to write the better; but as he is adapted to it by Nature he shall grow the perfecter writer.  
—BEN JONSON.<sup>1</sup>

I mean not here the prosody of a verse, which they could not but have hit on before among the rudiments of grammar; but that sublime art which in Aristotle's *Poetics*, in Horace, and the Italian commentaries of Castelvetro [on Aristotle], Tasso, Mazzoni, and others, teaches what the laws are of a true epic poem, what of a dramatic, what of a lyric, what 'decorum' is, which is the grand masterpiece to observe. This would make them soon perceive what despicable creatures our common rhymers and play-writers

<sup>1</sup> *Discoveries*, ed. by Castelain, p. 127. Castelain notes the sources of Jonson's free adaptations, in Stobaeus and Heinsius.

mentators of the Renaissance, in whom we find unexpected, yet seemingly conventional, modifications of Aristotle's doctrines; but the salient fact for us is this, that if literary criticism in a broad sense begins with Aristophanes and Plato, in the narrower sense it begins with this work of Aristotle on poetry, which for ancient Greece is representative and final.

The treatise is important, secondly, because directly or indirectly it has commanded more attention than any other book of literary criticism, so that the course of literary history after it is unintelligible without an acquaintance with the *Poetics* at first hand, whether in the original or through a translation.

But further, the work has a permanent value, quite apart from historical considerations. Aristotle's fundamental assumptions, and the generalizations upon which he mainly insists, are as true of any modern literature as they are of his own. That a work of art, for instance,—a drama, or the like—may be compared to a living organism, every part of whose structure is dependent upon the function of the whole, is a conception having validity for the ages. And the same may be affirmed of his contention that poetry has its own standard of correctness or fitness, and is to be judged primarily by its own laws. Of the minor generalizations, one that nowadays is often challenged concerns the social station of the tragic hero. It is maintained that Aristotle, having no prevision of the modern democratic movement, could hold no true opinion respecting the average man, or the man in humble circumstances, as compared with the man of distinguished birth and position, in an important tragic role. To this it may be



replied that Aristotle had formed, and elsewhere expressed, a very just estimate of the relation of individual worth to external goods and hereditary name; that the age of Pericles, in which high tragedy flourished, was notably democratic; that Euripides had represented men of humble birth in tragedy; and that Aristotle's own age, three generations after Euripides, and an age of despotism, took a somewhat unusual interest in burgher life upon the stage. It is easy to believe that many problems which are thought to be peculiar to the modern drama had been discussed, and were settled, in the theory of Aristotle's time, and that the desirability, or undesirability, of choosing a tragic hero from the lower walks of life was among the mooted questions. After all, how little of the ancient Greek drama do we really know!—except for fragments, perhaps one-tenth of the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, from among all the writers of tragedy in their age, and of the tragedies intervening between Euripides and Aristotle, virtually nothing unless it be the *Rhesus*, if the authorship of that is still in dispute. The generalizations of the *Poetics* were based upon a varied literature which has mostly disappeared.

The treatise is further valuable for its method and perspective. Simply and directly it lays emphasis upon what is of first importance: upon the vital structure of a poem rather than the metre; upon the end and aim of tragedy in its effect upon the emotions rather than the history of the Chorus (for the Chorus, by Aristotle's time, may have counted for less than it subsequently does in the Roman closet-drama). The manner of presentation is not rhapsodical. Profound thoughts, in the main clear, are ex-

pressed in language suited to a scientific inquiry. There may be little, indeed, to suggest the ease and grace of style for which other works of Aristotle were commended in antiquity. Though the central thought of the *Poetics*, that the plot is the soul of tragedy, is an imaginative conception, a metaphor, in this work we need look for no ornate prose such as Shelley and Ruskin give way to in dealing with fine art. The tone of Aristotle may rather be compared to that of Leonardo da Vinci in his treatise on painting; and his procedure is a model of the way in which one ought to study a literary type. So far as we may gather, his mode of investigating the laws of poetry must have been somewhat as follows.

Starting with the Platonic assumption that a literary form, an oration, for example, or a tragedy, has the nature of a living organism, Aristotle advanced to the position that each distinct kind of literature must have a definite and characteristic activity or function, and that this specific function or determinant principle must be equivalent to the effect which the form produces upon a competent observer; that is, form and function being as it were interchangeable terms, the organism *is* what it does to the person who is capable of judging what it does or ought to do. Then further, beginning again with the general literary estimates, in a measure naïve, but in a measure also learned, that had become more or less crystallized during the interval between the age of the Attic drama and his own time, and that enabled him to assign tentative values to one play and another, the great critic found a way to select out of a large extant literature a small number of tragedies which must necessarily conform more nearly

than the rest to the ideal type. As in the *Politics*, which is based upon researches among a great number of municipal constitutions, yet with emphasis upon a few, so in the *Poetics* his inductions for tragedy must repose upon a collection of instances as exhaustive as he knew how to make it without loss of perspective; that is, his observation was inclusive so that he might not pass over what since the days of Bacon we have been accustomed to think of as 'crucial instances.' By a penetrating scrutiny of these crucial instances in tragedy, he still more narrowly defined what ought to be the proper effect of this kind of literature upon the ideal spectator, namely, the effect which he terms the *catharsis* of pity and fear, the purgation of two disturbing emotions. Then, reasoning from function back to form, and from form again to function, he would test each select tragedy, and every part of it, by the way in which the part and the whole conduced to this emotional relief. In this manner, he arrived at the conception of an ideal structure for tragedy, a pattern which, though never fully realized in any existing Greek drama, must yet constitute the standard for all of its kind. He proceeded, in fact, as does the anatomist, whose representation of the normal skeleton and muscles is an act of the imagination, ascending from the actual to an ideal truth, and is never quite realized in any individual, though nearly realized in what one would consider a normal man; or perhaps as does the sculptor, who by an imaginative synthesis combines the elements which he has observed in the finest specimens of humanity into a form more perfect than nature ever succeeds in producing.

Finally, the *Poetics*, if it be sympathetically studied,

may be thought to have a special value at the present time, when a school has arisen, led by the ingenious Professor Croce, whose notion seems to be that there really are no types in art, and hence no standards of interpretation and criticism save the aim of the individual writer or painter. In his tractate *Of Education*, Milton alludes to some 'antidote' in one part of literature to an evil tendency in another. Whenever the *Poetics* of Aristotle receives the attention it demands, it serves as an antidote to anarchy in criticism.

We turn to a few separate points which the student may note before reading the translation.

1. Poetry, for Aristotle, is a genus which is sharply divided into species, the noblest of which is tragedy. Taken together, these species—tragedy, comedy, the epic, and others, if others there were—would constitute the genus, without any surplus or residuum. He could not think of any poetry independent of some distinct kind of poem. Nor should we; though we might include in the genus, as separate forms, certain kinds of lyric poems which he would doubtless include, not under poetry, but music. Through a confusion of thought which he escapes, we often loosely speak of imaginative literature as comprising 'poetry and the drama'—as if the drama were not poetry—when we probably ought to say 'lyrical, narrative, and dramatic poetry.' Or we carelessly talk of 'a dramatic poem,' when we actually mean, not comedy or tragedy, but something short of it—a narrative poem, for example, verging upon drama, but not fully realizing either form. One thinks of certain works of Browning which are neither truly narrative nor truly dramatic poems (that is,



dramas), but in a confused way represent both types. Here one must try to discover which of two or three types is uppermost in the poet's mind, decide whether it fulfils the purpose of an epic poem, or of some other kind of poetry, and judge accordingly. The work must either be a poem, or not a poem; if it is poetry, it must be some species of poetry, or else a hybrid.

2. Aristotle was the son of a physician, and, though he took all knowledge for his province, had himself a special or hereditary interest in medicine. That his thinking in the *Poetics* is tinged by this interest is clear from his conception of tragedy as a purgative of distressing emotions. But there are not a few more casual allusions to the same department of knowledge. Early in the treatise, Empedocles is referred to as one who threw the facts of medicine into verse, but did not thereby become a poet; yet when Aristotle reaches the subject of diction in poetry, he cites figures of speech, on blood-letting and the use of the knife, from this same medical versifier. On one occasion, he mentions a riddle descriptive of a doctor cupping a patient; on another, he recalls the parallel lines in Aeschylus and Euripides on the wounded foot of Philoctetes. Again, a faulty arrangement or disturbance in the parts of a tragedy reminds him of the dislocation of bones and the singular appearance of the whole body when a limb is out of place.

His interest in medicine, however, is subordinate to his studies in the wider subject of zoology, and to his occupation with biology in the most general sense. Since he compiled an encyclopedic work on animals that even now is instructive, we are not astonished at his dwelling on the

Platonic comparison of a poem to a living creature. The form or essential structure is to a poem what the soul, or 'form' (as he would call it), of an animal is to its body. Doubtless this is a conception in which the philosophy of Socrates and Plato has a common ground with that of Aristotle; it seems to be a fundamental conception for all human thought. At any rate, there is a fundamental notion in the Aristotelian philosophy that the universe itself must be likened to an animal, having the Deity as its principle of life. All nature thus becomes a work of art whose soul, or form, or creative principle, is God.

3. To Aristotle, then, soul and body are the inner and outer aspects of one and the same object, so that the inmost meaning of a thing is vitally connected with its outer manifestation. According to circumstances, he will lay stress upon one aspect or the other. Similarly, with him, a given word may have a deeper or a more superficial meaning. Thus the *hamartia*, or shortcoming, in a tragic person may refer to something within the man, or to an outward act, a particular shortcoming or case of misjudgment, which brings about his downfall. The same is true of the word *mimesis*, or imitation.

4. This word *mimesis* is likely to cause trouble on a first reading of the *Poetics*. To begin with, it implies, but does not signify, the prime activity of the poet, or of the artist in the widest sense—what we might call the poetic or artistic imagination. It implies the existence of this imagination, but does not directly stand for such a power. It signifies the copying by the poet or artist of the thing he has imagined, the representing of his image in a medium—language, or pigments, or musical notes—which may be

perceived by the senses. This is its primary meaning. The poet has his conception of a story, or the musician has his conception of a theme, and he puts this conception into rhythmical language or musical notes. He does not copy the work of another; he imitates or embodies the inner form or soul of his own making in an outer medium for the senses of his audience. Nor does he copy any work of nature. Thus Cicero, speaking of Phidias, says: 'Neither did this artist, when he carved the image of Jupiter or Minerva, set before him any one human figure as a pattern which he was to copy; but having a more perfect idea of beauty fixed in his mind, this he steadily contemplated, and to the imitation of this all his skill and labor were directed.'<sup>8</sup>

So much for the inner meaning of the word. Outwardly, *mimesis* means the result of the poet's effort, the imitation as it at length appears to the senses, the finished work of art—*Oedipus the King* of Sophocles, the statue as Phidias left it, or, let us say, Leonardo's portrait of Mona Lisa.

5. The idea of a transformation of personality, in the agents of a drama or an epic, is not entirely alien to the *Poetics*. The opinion frequently is heard that an element of difference in the modern from the ancient drama consists in what we term development of character. Now it is true that the scope of a play like *Macbeth* or *King Lear* does afford an opportunity for some display of the successive stages in the history of a moral deterioration or advance in the persons of the drama; though it may be questioned whether our interest in this process is not more

<sup>8</sup> Translation by Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Fifteen Discourses on Art, The Third Discourse*.

of an intellectual than a truly emotional or artistic interest. In any case, the tragic change of fortune, from happiness to misery, or the reverse, as described in the treatise, must involve a modification in the spirit of a hero; and the transformation of will and feeling in Creon, Oedipus, and the rest—that is, in the tragedies upon which Aristotle's work is founded—is adequate to the end of arousing pity and fear. But we should not search in the *Poetics* for anything on the education of any hero beyond his enlightenment with respect to a given tragic situation.

6. It will now be proper to mention the great discrepancy in the treatise, between the general statement that the best tragedy is one with an unhappy ending, and the more particular assertion that the best tragic situation is the one in which some person is about to injure a blood-relative unwittingly, and discovers the identity of his intended victim in time to draw back. One explanation of the discrepancy I have suggested within brackets in the translation (pp. 46, 47). Another is that of Professor Bywater, who maintains that Aristotle is not quite the unerring writer we commonly deem him, and is capable of inconsistency in larger as well as smaller details. Still another would be that we possibly have in the treatise merely the notes of a student, taken down from oral delivery. Now it often happens that a student records but a part of what is said on one occasion, and but a part of what is said on another upon a similar topic, without the necessary qualifications in either case, and in such a way that his notes contain a glaring contradiction, though the lecturer may in some fashion, tacitly it may be, have provided against an inconsistency.

Still another is this, and I give it because it helps to characterize the *Poetics* as a whole. The method of the work, though it leads to sure results in the main, is often tentative enough, with a balancing of arguments as in a dialogue. Indeed, the treatise is thought to bear some relation, we do not know exactly what, to a lost dialogue of Aristotle *On Poets*, which may have been an earlier production. But for a few indications of the style of a lecturer, it would not be impossible to fancy that the *Poetics* itself in some way contained the materials of a dialogue, in which discrepant views on poetry were stated and discussed. Certainly, as in the discussion pro and con of the respective claims of tragedy and epic poetry in Chapter 26, there are signs of the influence of dialectic procedure, even though the work were intended as a monologue. Bearing this in mind, one might suggest an explanation of the difficulty as follows. Aristotle doubtless preferred Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, with its unhappy ending, and with its other excellences, to all other tragedies, and was ready to accord the palm to this type of poem. But he had, as we may gather from the frequent references to Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, a very high regard for this latter play, too, so that it was one of the examples most often before him in his search for the ideal plot; and so soon as he gives his attention to this type of drama (in which the deed of horror is averted), he is bent upon explaining its excellence, if he can find a psychological basis for its satisfactory emotional effect. Accordingly, he would tend to represent the claims of this type with a good deal of skill and force. If he were sufficiently influenced by the spirit of the dialogue form, his argument



might be very deceptive, for he is a Greek and something of a casuist. Yet in the end he would throw the balance in favor of the play with the unhappy ending; just as in Chapter 26, though he makes out a strong case for epic poetry, and alludes to the supremacy of Homer, he nevertheless decides that tragedy is the higher kind of art. This explanation is obviously hypothetical, but not entirely out of keeping with the one I have offered in the translation.

Thus much may be said by way of general introduction to an English rendering of the *Poetics* designed for the sort of reader I have mentioned in the Preface. If more is needed for a student lacking any considerable familiarity with Greek literature, I may refer him, out of a wide choice, to an article on *Greek Drama and the Dance*, by G. Warre Cornish, in the *Fortnightly Review* for February, 1913, and to another, entitled *Aristotle's Views on Music and their Relation to Modern Ideas*, by R. H. Bradley, in the *Westminster Review* of the same date. And I cannot forbear to mention as a work at once popular, scientific, and indispensable to an understanding of the Greek drama, the third edition of Haigh's *The Attic Theatre* (Clarendon Press, 1907). The inspiring volume of Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, is so well known in this country that I scarcely need to name it.

In revising this book in the year 1946, let me here refer to my volumes: *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy*, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922; *Aristotelian Papers*, Cornell University Press, 1939 (therein see especially the articles, *The Villain as Hero*, and *The Verbal Ornament*—compare below, page 70); *Plato: Phaedrus, Ion*, [etc.],

Oxford University Press, 1938; *Plato on the Trial and Death of Socrates*, Cornell University Press, 1941 (this and the preceding work relate the views of the *Poetics* of Aristotle to the structure and aim of the Platonic Dialogues); *Fifteen Greek Plays*, Oxford University Press, 1942 (therein see a revised rendering and adaptation of the *Poetics*, and a condensed form of *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy*); lastly, *Experiments in Education*, Cornell University Press, 1942, which contains a list of my published writings up to that date, including references to other articles and books germane to the present book, as *A Bibliography of the Poetics of Aristotle* by Cooper and Gudeman, Cornell Studies in English, No. 11, 1928.

Among other books that could not be listed in that *Bibliography* (see its date), note *Dithyramb, Tragedy, and Comedy*, by A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1927; and *Aristoteles, Poetik*, ed. by Alfred Gudeman, Berlin and Leipzig, De Gruyter & Co., 1934.



# ARISTOTLE

## ON THE ART OF POETRY

### I

#### EPIC POETRY AND TRAGEDY, AND COMEDY, CONSIDERED IN GENERAL AS FORMS OF IMITATIVE ART

In this work, we propose to discuss the nature of the poetic art in general, and to treat of its different species in particular, with regard to the essential quality or function of each species—which is equivalent to the proper and characteristic effect of each upon the trained sensibilities of the judicious. Accordingly, we shall examine that organic structure of the whole which is indispensable to the production of an ideally effective poem, including the number and nature of the constituent parts, together with such other matters as fall within the same inquiry respecting form and function.

#### CHAPTER I

Poetry; its  
Species; their  
Structure and  
Function

[It will be observed that the treatise as it has come down to us carries out only a part of what we might expect from this program. The work apparently is incomplete. It contains, indeed, a discussion of the characteristic emotional effect of tragic poetry, that is, of

tragedy proper and, mainly by implication, such epic poems as resemble tragedy in their seriousness; but it does not explain the effect, emotional or intellectual, of comedy. Nor does it treat of the special powers or functions of the several kinds of lyric poetry, or of the characteristic quality in such works of the poetic imagination as the Socratic dialogues of Plato; though there is passing allusion both to lyrical forms and the dialogue. Lyric poetry Aristotle might have chosen to discuss in a work more directly concerned with the art of music; comedy he must have treated at length in a section of the present work that is lost. The part that remains owes its unity to the emphasis that is laid upon tragedy as the highest and typical form of serious poetry.]

Turning first to the conception of poetry in general, we may follow the natural order, and begin with what is fundamental, the principle of artistic imitation. Epic Poetry and Tragedy, as well as Comedy and Dithyrambic Poetry, and for the most part the music of the flute and lyre, in their general nature are forms of imitation; that is, they represent, or imitate, something through an arrangement of words or notes. But, having this in common, that they all are forms of imitation, at the same time they differ from one another in three respects; there are differences in:

(1) The Means by which they imitate—the ‘medium,’ as for example, language or melody.

(2) The Objects as these are represented—one art may represent the same object as better, and another worse, than the object ordinarily is.

(3) The Manner in which these objects are imitated—

Art is an Imitation or representation of an Object, in a Medium chosen by the artist



Tragedy, for example, directly presents the actions of men, whereas Epic Poetry relates such actions.

As for the Means, we may instance those who by conscious art, or mere habitual practice, represent the likenesses of many objects through the medium of line and color; or those who for their medium of imitation employ the voice. Similarly in the arts that have been mentioned above, taken as a group, the imitation of the objects is produced in the medium of rhythm and language and melody, these three media being used either singly or in certain combinations. Thus in the music of the flute or the lyre, the media are melody and rhythm combined; as in any other arts having a similar effect—for instance, imitative piping. In the art of dancing, the medium is rhythm alone, without melody; for the dancers also represent human character, and what men do and undergo; and the medium of this imitation is rhythm in bodily movement.

Now there is an Art, the subject of this general discussion, in which the medium of imitation is language alone, without melody, and that, too, whether the language be non-metrical or metrical; if it be metrical language, there may be one single form of verse, or several forms together. For this inclusive art of imitation in language, common usage up to the present has no name; since we have no term that might be applied in common to the farcical prose dramas of Sophron or Xenarchus and an imaginary dialogue of the traditional Socrates. And we should still be at a loss for a common term even if the imitation in these cases employed the medium of iambic, elegiac, or any other such metre. People have a way, it is true, of connecting the word Poet, that is, 'maker,' with the name of

1. The Means  
An example  
from painting

From singing

From instru-  
mental music

From the art  
of dancing

An Art whose  
Medium is  
Language

Verse is not  
the essential  
thing in the  
artistic rep-  
resentation

one or another kind of verse, so that they talk of 'elegiac poets,' and 'epic' or hexameter 'poets,' as if it were not the principle of imitation that characterized the artist—as if one might term them all poets indiscriminately because of the metre. The custom is followed even when a work on medicine or natural science is brought out in verse; people call the author a poet. But the *Iliad* of Homer and the versified natural science of Empedocles really have nothing in common save the metre; and hence, if it is proper to style Homer a poet, Empedocles must be classed as a natural scientist rather than a poet. [A similar distinction might be drawn between the poetry of Wordsworth and the versified botany of Erasmus Darwin.] And the same kind of reasoning would hold even if an author in his poetic imitation were to include every sort of metre, as is actually done in the *Centaur* of Chaeremon, a rhapsody in which all kinds are mingled. We could not, for example, term Chaeremon an 'elegiac poet'; yet we must recognize that he falls under the general category of the poets.

[In the foregoing digression on metre, Aristotle clearly regards verse, not as essential to poetry, but as the customary adjunct of the art. It is the principle of imitation that is essential, and the embodiment in metrical or non-metrical language is a secondary consideration. But it should be remarked that he offers no real support to the inference that rhythm in the larger sense, as distinguished from metres (which are 'species of rhythm'), is of little consequence in poetic imitation. The medium of the 'nameless' art which includes the *Dialogues* of Plato and the *Iliad* of Homer may be metrical language, or non-metrical, but in both cases it is rhythmical. At the same

time, he does not venture to call 'a Socratic Dialogue' a poem, or to regard the imaginative art which imitates in non-metrical, though perhaps rhythmical, language as 'poetry.' The inclusive art, he says, has not yet received a name. At the end of the digression he tacitly conforms to the usage of his time, and accepts metre as characteristic of poetry. Modern writers, as Shelley, are often willing to use the word 'poetry' as a generic term covering the rhythmical language of Plato and the English Bible as well as the strictly metrical language of Homer and Milton. In the German word *dichtung* we have an inclusive term corresponding to Aristotle's general notion of artistic imitation in the medium of language.]

We may turn, then, from these distinctions in the arts which employ their several media either singly or in combinations of two each, to consider, lastly, certain other arts which combine all the media enumerated, namely, rhythm, melody, and verse. Such are the arts of Dithyrambic and Nomic Poetry, and Tragedy and Comedy. But in these, again, there is a difference; for in Dithyrambic and Nomic Poetry all three of the media are employed together, whereas in Tragedy and Comedy they are brought in separately, one after another. [More strictly, there is, in the successive parts of a drama, a preponderance of one medium over another.]

Arts that employ the three media of Rhythm, Melody, and Verse

These, then, may be regarded as the differences in the arts so far as concerns the media through which the imitation is accomplished.

Accordingly, we may proceed to the Objects which the imitator represents. The primary objects of artistic imitation are human beings in action, men performing

CHAPTER 2

2. The Ob-  
jects: Men in  
Action

Men either  
above or  
below the  
average

Or average  
Men

A correspond-  
ing difference  
in the Arts

or undergoing something. [This will be found generally true, even where at first glance the objects imitated may seem to be other than human, as in the *Lyrical Ballads* of Wordsworth, the *Idylls* of Theocritus, or the *Birds* of Aristophanes. So also in fables and bestiaries, the thing primarily imitated is human nature acting or being acted upon.] And the agents must be either of a higher or a lower type; for virtually all the distinctions in human character are derived from the primary distinction between goodness and badness which divides the human race. It follows that, in the imitation, the agents must be represented as better than we ourselves, or worse, or some such men as we. Thus, to take an illustration from the painters, Polygnotus depicted men better than the average, Pauson men worse than the average, and Dionysius men like ourselves. [Similarly, the subjects of Raphael are of a higher type, while those of Hogarth are of a lower, and those of the Dutch portraitists are near to the average level of humanity.]

It is clear that each of the modes of imitation we have noted will admit of these differences of elevation in the Object as imitated, and that each will become a separate art through this difference in representing the object as higher, or lower, or midway between the two extremes. Such diversities are possible even in dancing and flute-playing and lyre-playing. And they are possible also in the art, hitherto nameless, which employs metrical or non-metrical language, without melody, as its medium. [That is, they are possible in *dichtung*.] Thus the agents represented by Homer are better than we; the agents in the epic of the commonplace by Cleophon are on the average

level; and those in the mock-heroic travesty of Homer by Hegemon of Thasos—who was the first to engage in the literature of parody—are below the average, as are the personages in the mock-heroic *Diliad* of Nicochares. [Similarly, the knights in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* are agents of a higher type; the monks in Frere's *King Arthur and His Round Table* are of a lower type; and the agents in the modern realistic novel for the most part are persons like ourselves.] The same distinction holds good in Dithyrambs and Nomes—for example, in the higher types represented by . . . [the name is missing] and the lower types of Argas; and it is illustrated by the difference in the treatment of Polyphemus by Timotheus, who elevated the type, and Philoxenus, who rendered the Cyclops ignoble. Now, so far as the objects of the imitation are concerned, the nobility of the agents is what distinguishes Tragedy from Comedy. Comedy tends to represent the agents as worse, and Tragedy as better than the men of the present day.

Herein we  
have one dif-  
ference  
between  
Tragedy and  
Comedy

There is yet a third difference in these several arts, touching the Manner in which each kind of Object is imitated; for the Manner may vary in three ways. Let us suppose three cases in which the object of the imitation remains the same (say, heroic men in action), and the medium also (say, metrical language). Under these conditions, (1) the poet may produce his imitation by speaking now in narrative, and now in an assumed role, as Homer does; or (2) he may continue speaking throughout in the same person, without change; or (3) the whole story may be represented in the form of an action carried on by several persons as in real life.

CHAPTER 3

3. The  
Manner



A summary  
of the differ-  
ences

Suggesting  
points of  
similarity in  
the leading  
Tragic, Epic,  
and Comic  
Poets

Digression on  
the etymology  
of 'Drama'  
and on the  
alleged origins  
of Comedy and  
Tragedy

There are, then, as was said at the beginning, these three differences by which the several kinds of artistic imitation are distinguished: a difference in the medium of imitation; a difference in the objects; and a difference in the manner. The distinction enables us to point out corresponding lines of similarity in certain kinds of art. Thus, in respect to the objects represented, the dramatist Sophocles is akin to the epic poet Homer, for both of them represent agents of a higher type; and in respect to the manner of imitation, the tragedies of Sophocles are akin to the comedies of Aristophanes, since both poets present the agents directly as experiencing and doing in person. Indeed, according to the Dorians—who base their opinion on linguistic grounds—herein lies the reason why comedies and tragedies are called 'dramas,' namely, because in both kinds of poetry men are represented as *act-ing* (*drontes*, from the verb *dran*). Hence also the Dorians lay claim to the invention of Tragedy as well as Comedy; for Comedy is claimed by the Megarians (= Dorians)—by those of Greece, who contend that it arose among them at the time when Megara became a democracy, and on the other hand by the Megarians of Sicily, on the ground that the first true comic poet, Epicharmus, was a Sicilian who lived much earlier than the Attic comic poets Chionides and Magnes; and Tragedy likewise is claimed by certain of the Dorians in the Peloponnese (i.e., the Sicyonians). Now these claims are put forward as resting upon the etymology of the words *comedy* and *drama*. Their term for rural hamlets, the Dorians say, is not *demes*, as with the Athenians, but *comae*; and they assume that *comedians* acquired their name, not from

*comazein*, 'to revel,' but from their habit of strolling about from village to village (*cata comas*), when a lack of appreciation forced them out of the city. As for the etymology of 'drama,' they allege that the Dorian word for 'to act' is not *prattein*, as with the Athenians, but *dran*. [It is to be observed that Aristotle neither accepts nor censures the argument of 'the Dorians.' Just before mentioning it, he uses participial forms of both *dran* and *prattein* together, in order to emphasize the thought that *men in action*, whether doing or suffering, are alike essential to both kinds of drama. In his subsequent definition of Tragedy, he uses the participle of *dran* when he describes the manner of imitation as 'in the form of action.'—He does not suggest an etymology for 'tragedy.' The Greek word is compounded of elements signifying 'goat-song,' that is, a performance by men disguised as satyrs.—Notwithstanding the assumption of the Dorians, 'comedy' seems to be connected by derivation with the word *comazein*, 'to revel,' and with the Comus, or wandering dance of the Phallic worshippers.]

Let this suffice, then, on the number and nature of the differences in the various kinds of artistic imitation.

As to its general origin, we may say that Poetry has sprung from two causes, each of them a thing inherent in human nature. The first is the habit of imitation; for to imitate is instinctive with mankind; and man is superior to the other animals, for one thing, in that he is the most imitative of creatures, and learns at first by imitation. Secondly, all men take a natural pleasure in the products of imitation—a pleasure to which the facts of experience bear witness; for even when the original objects are re-

## CHAPTER 4

Poetry has its origin in two natural instincts

1. The impulse to imitate

2. The natural delight in the results

pulsive, as the most objectionable of the lower animals, or dead bodies, we still delight to contemplate their forms as represented in a picture with the utmost fidelity. [One is reminded of the corpse in Rembrandt's painting, 'The Lesson in Anatomy.'] The explanation of this delight lies in a further characteristic of our species, the appetite for learning; for among human pleasures that of learning is the keenest—not only to the scholarly, but to the rest of mankind as well, no matter how limited their capacity. Accordingly, the reason why men delight in a picture is that in the act of contemplating it they are acquiring knowledge and drawing inferences—as when they exclaim: 'Why, that is So-and-So!' Consequently, if one does not happen to have seen the original, any pleasure that arises from the picture will be due, not to the imitation as such, but to the execution, or the coloring, or some similar cause.

The pleasure  
in the process  
of recognition

To imitate, then, is natural in us as men; just as our sense of musical harmony and our sense of rhythm are natural—and it is to be noted that metre plainly falls under the general head of rhythm. In the beginning, therefore, being possessed of these natural endowments, men originated poetry, the process of generation coming about by gradual and, in the main, slight advances upon the first naïve improvisations. So much for the origin of the art in general.

There is also  
a natural in-  
stinct for  
harmony and  
rhythm

More particularly, now, Poetry broke up into two varieties, corresponding to a difference of personal character in the authors; for the graver spirits would represent noble actions, while the meaner would represent the doings of the ignoble. And whereas others composed hymns and

Two main  
varieties of  
poetry

panegyrics, the latter sort at first produced lampoons. We are unable, it is true, to mention a poem in the satirical vein by any of the poets before Homer, though there probably were many satirists among them. But from Homer down, we can name various instances of satirical poetry—for example, the Homeric *Margites*, and similar works of other poets. In the early satirical poems, its inherent suitability brought into use an iambic metre; and the reason why we employ the term ‘iambic’ for *satirical* to-day is that these poets formerly lampooned, or ‘iam-bized,’ one another in this metre. Of the early poets, accordingly, some became writers of iambic verse, and others of heroic.

Origin of iambic satire

But Homer, who shared in both tendencies, was superior to the other poets of either class. As for his supremacy in the serious style, he stands alone, not only through the general excellence of his imitations, but through their dramatic quality as well; for he makes his personages live before us. So also was he superior in the comic vein, since he first marked out the general lines of Comedy, by rendering the ludicrous—and not personal satire—dramatic; for his mock-heroic *Margites* stands in the same relation to Comedy as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to Tragedy.

Homer excelled both in the serious and in the comic vein

When Tragedy and Comedy came into existence, however, those poets whose natural bent was toward lower subjects no longer took up lampooning, but became writers of comedy; and the graver spirits no longer became epic poets, but producers of tragedy. And the reason was that these newer forms were grander, and were held in greater esteem.

[Assuming, now, that Tragedy as a whole has reached

the stage of a complete artistic form, Aristotle dismisses any question as to the completeness or incompleteness of development in the various constituent parts.] Whether in respect to its formative elements Tragedy has developed as far as need be, would constitute a separate inquiry; the question would have to be decided in and for itself, and also in relation to the theatres. [The investigation suggested by Aristotle might involve a study, for example, of the development of the Chorus: had the function of this been curtailed as far as might be, considering its original importance, and as far as need be, considering the right way of presenting a tragedy before an audience?]

Evolution of  
Tragedy

Tragedy at all events originated in improvisations, as did Comedy also; for Tragedy goes back to the improvising poet-leaders in the dithyrambic chorus of satyrs; and Comedy to the leaders of the Phallic song and dance, the performance of which is still to be found as a custom in many of the cities. And from this beginning, Tragedy progressed little by little, as the successive authors gradually improved upon what preceded them. Finally the development ceased, when Tragedy, through a long series of changes, had attained to its natural form. The principal changes were three. (1) From the single spokesman of the primitive form, Aeschylus increased the number of actors to two [we must bear in mind that one actor might take several parts in a play]; he diminished the part taken by the Chorus—that is, he reduced the amount of choral chanting; and he made the spoken dialogue the chief element in the play. (2) Sophocles brought about the innovation of three actors, and was the first to make use of

Innovations  
of Aeschylus

Of Sophocles



painted scenery. (3) Furthermore, there was a change in the magnitude of the action represented; for the little plots of the primitive form were abandoned; and, with its development out of the satyr-dance, Tragedy also discarded the grotesque early diction. Thus, at a late period however, it assumed its characteristic elevation of tone.

A gain in  
scope and  
dignity

At the same time, the trochaic tetrameter gave way to an iambic measure. Indeed, the reason for the early use of the trochaic tetrameter was that Tragedy retained its connection with satyrs, and was more nearly allied to choral dancing than at present. But so soon as the element of spoken discourse entered in, nature herself suggested the appropriate metre—the iambic; for this is the readiest metre in speaking, as may be seen in ordinary conversation, where we are apt to fall into an iambic measure. [That something similar is true in English one may discover by listening for an iambic beat in everyday speech.]

A more suit-  
able metre:  
the iambic

On the other hand, our talk seldom runs into hexameters, and only when we depart from our usual cadence. (4) Still another change was the increase in the number of episodes constituting the action. But as to this and the other, adventitious, embellishments of Tragedy, and their traditional origin, let the general account which has been given be regarded as including them; for very likely it would prove a long task to follow all these matters out in detail. [The history of the tragic costume might be one of the things which Aristotle here refuses to discuss. A moment later he is reminded of the comic mask.]

Fourth, a  
group of  
minor  
matters

As for Comedy, this, as we have said, is an artistic imitation of men of an inferior moral bent; faulty, however, not in any or every way, but only in so far as their short-

CHAPTER 5

The Agents  
in Comedy,  
and the  
nature of the  
Ludicrous

comings are ludicrous; for the Ludicrous is a species or part, not all, of the Ugly. It may be described as that kind of shortcoming and deformity which does not strike us as painful, and causes no harm to others; a ready example is afforded by the comic mask, which is ludicrous, being ugly and distorted, without any suggestion of pain.

No data for  
the early  
stages of  
Comedy

While the successive changes which Tragedy underwent, and the authors of these changes, have not escaped notice, there is no record of the early development of Comedy, for the reason that this form of drama was not at first seriously regarded as a matter of public concern. Not until late in its progress was the comic poet provided by the magistrate with a chorus; until then the performers were simply unpaid volunteers. And it had already taken definite shape by the time we begin to have a record of those who are termed poets in this kind. Who was responsible for the introduction of masks, or prologues, or more than one actor—concerning these and other like details we are in ignorance. But we know that the framing of plots was due to Epicharmus and Phormis, and hence originated in Sicily; and that, of Athenian poets, Crates was the first to discard personal satire, constructing, instead, plots of an impersonal nature and general comic value.

Yet two im-  
portant facts  
are known

As we have seen, Epic Poetry has thus much in common with Tragedy: it is an imitation, in a lofty kind of verse, of serious events. Still there is a difference, on the metrical side, in the medium of imitation, as well as a difference in the manner; for the Epic employs one and the same metre throughout, namely the hexameter [whereas Tragedy employs more than one metre], and

General dif-  
ferences be-  
tween the  
Epic Poem and  
Tragedy

Epic Poetry is in the form of a tale that is told, and not, like Tragedy, of an action directly presented. And there is further a difference in length [the *Odyssey*, for example, contains about eight times as many lines as Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*]; for the Epic is not restricted to any fixed limit of time. [The time that elapses in the action proper of the *Iliad* is about forty-five days, in that of the *Odyssey*, forty-two.] Writers of Tragedy, on the other hand, endeavor to represent the action as taking place within a period of twenty-four hours (that is, within a period of one apparent revolution of the sun), or at all events try to avoid exceeding this limit by very much. This difference in respect to time exists at present; but at first tragic and epic poets were alike in not restricting themselves to any special limits. Finally, Epic Poetry and Tragedy differ in respect to their constituent parts; for some parts [four] are common to both forms, and some [two] are peculiar to Tragedy (see p. 77). All the parts of an Epic are to be found in Tragedy; but not all the parts of Tragedy are included in the Epic Poem. It follows that a person who can tell what is good or bad art in the composition of a Tragedy can do the same for Epic Poetry too.

A critic of  
Tragedy can  
judge an Epic  
Poem

[Aristotle, as we see, remarks that in practice the Greek tragic poets of his own day (seventy years after the death of Euripides) try to confine the action within certain limits of time. This is a purely scientific observation; it is what he finds true in dramas he has examined. He neither commends nor censures the practice. He is not at this point giving advice either to poets or critics. Accordingly, the supposed law or rule of 'the unity of time,' concerning

which not a little has been heard since the Italian theories of poetry in the sixteenth century (followed by Corneille, Racine, and others in France), finds slender justification in the present treatise. As for its supposed corollary, 'the unity of place,' there is no mention of such a thing in Aristotle; and whatever his contemporaries may have done, the elder tragic poets did not invariably confine the action to one place. In the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus, for example, the scene shifts from Delphi to Athens; and there is an obvious change of place in the *Ajax* of Sophocles.]

## II

### TRAGEDY DEFINED. THE PRINCIPLES OF ITS CONSTRUCTION

We are to reserve until later any more extended discussion of the Epic, that form of poetry which employs hexameter verse, and of Comedy, and are to deal first with Tragedy, the main topic of the present treatise. As a preliminary, we may frame a definition of the essence of Tragedy, in the main by putting together things already said.

CHAPTER 6

A Tragedy, then, is an artistic imitation of an action that is serious, complete in itself, and of an adequate magnitude; so much for the object which is imitated. As for the medium, the imitation is produced in language embellished in more than one way, one kind of embellishment being introduced separately in one part, and another kind in another part of the whole. As for the manner, the imitation is itself in the form of an action directly presented, not narrated. And as for the proper function resulting from the imitation of such an object in such a medium and manner, it is to arouse the emotions of pity and fear in the audience; and to arouse this pity and fear in such a way as to effect that special purging off and relief (*catharsis*) of these two emotions which is the characteristic of Tragedy. [Pity and fear are two from among

Definition of  
Tragedy

the general class of disturbing emotions which it is the office of the various arts severally to relieve.]

Explanation  
of 'embel-  
lished lan-  
guage'

By 'language embellished in more than one way' is meant language which is simply rhythmical or metrical, language which is delivered in recitative, and language which is uttered in song. And by the separate introduction of one kind of embellished language in one part, and of another kind in another part, is meant that some portions of the tragedy (e.g., prologue and episode) are rendered in verse alone, without being sung or chanted, and other portions again (e.g., parade and stasimon) in the form of singing or chanting. [A tragedy being wholly in metrical language, the actors as well as the Chorus in delivering it employed, by turns, song, speech, and an intermediate mode of utterance—'recitative'—like chanting or intoning. The lyrical passages were nearly always sung. Passages of iambic trimeter were spoken. Other passages were given in recitative to the accompaniment of the flute.]

[The several elements in Aristotle's definition of tragedy are gathered from his previous remarks, as he says; save that hitherto the only possible reference to the function of tragedy, its effect upon the audience, or reader, is contained in the opening words of the treatise, where he promises to discuss the specific function of each kind of poetry. In the definition, he implies that other forms of art—we might instance comedy—have as their special end or pleasure the relief of others of the general class of disturbing emotions to which pity and fear belong.

The effect of tragedy upon the emotions is not merely something that took place in a former age, or among the



Greeks alone; it may be observed at all times, and in virtually all persons, including the reader of this sentence. However much the malign influence of a narrowly intellectual education may check the native motions of the heart, few indeed must be they who are hopelessly bereft of all pleasure in the tragic *catharsis*. For generations, it is true, there has been a debate over the precise meaning one should attach to Aristotle's phrase—a debate that frequently has turned upon the study of words apart from things, and on the whole has not been sufficiently concerned with the actual experience of audiences, or rather of specially qualified judges, during the presentation of good tragedy and immediately thereafter. But if the words of Aristotle describe an effect which really occurs, it must be that a person of intelligence and normal sympathies will undergo, and be able to mark, the experience, not only in witnessing the best tragedy, but even in reading it. The student of the *Poetics* might render his notion of the tragic *catharsis* more exact by an attempt to observe his own emotions when he reads, or re-reads, Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* or Shakespeare's *Othello*.

Furthermore, one might collect and examine the utterances of poets and other men of unusual sensibility on the feelings which tragic stories have aroused in them;—not primarily such conscious explanations of the Aristotelian *catharsis* as that of Milton in his preface to *Samson Agonistes*. This, though important, is a different kind of evidence from the lines in the first of Milton's Latin Elegies—thus translated by Cowper:

I gaze, and grieve, still cherishing my grief;  
At times, e'en bitter tears yield sweet relief.

Similar spontaneous illustrations of the tragic pleasure have come from other English poets; for example, Wordsworth, in the Dedication preceding *The White Doe of Rylstone*:

Pleasing was the smart,  
And the tear precious in compassion shed;

and Coleridge, in *Love*:

She wept with pity and delight.

It is probable also that a study of emotional suspense and its relief in the audience, by an experimental psychologist, would throw light upon the passage in Aristotle. For the present, however, no explanation could prove more helpful to the general reader than a part of Bywater's note, his language being followed almost verbatim:

In Greek physiology and pathology, *catharsis* is a very general term for a physical clearance or discharge, the removal by art or an effort of nature of some bodily product, which, if allowed to remain, would cause discomfort or harm. The *catharsis* of the soul as described in the *Politics* of Aristotle is a similar process in reference to certain emotions—the tacit assumption being apparently that the emotions in question are analogous to those peccant humors in the body which, according to the ancient humoral theory of medicine, have to be expelled from the system by the appropriate *catharsis*. With some adaptation of the statements and hints in *Politics* 8. 7, as thus interpreted, it is not difficult to recover the outlines at any rate of the Aristotelian theory of the cathartic effect of tragedy: Pity and fear are elements in human nature, and in some men they are present in a disquieting degree. With these latter the tragic excitement is a necessity; but it is also in a certain sense good for all. It serves as a sort of medicine, producing a *catharsis* to lighten and relieve the soul of the accumulated emotion within it; and as the relief is wanted, there is always a harmless pleasure attending the process of relief.

It must be added that pleasure, to Aristotle, signifies, not a passive state of being, but a form of activity.

In his working definition he does not allude to the element of pleasure in the tragic relief. As he develops his thought, we become aware that the relief is itself a form of pleasure; so that the characteristic effect of tragedy may be referred to as either one or the other. We discover, too, that there are certain satisfactions contributory to the main effect; for example, the pleasure of discovery or recognition, when we learn the author of a deed or the upshot of an incident; the pleasure of astonishment, when the outcome of a series of events is unexpected, yet is seen to be inevitable; and the pleasure derived from 'embellished language,' that is, from the rhythm and music of tragedy. Furthermore, the pleasure is explained negatively: the play must not offend us with effects that are revolting, or with events that run counter to our sense of what is reasonable and likely.]

Advancing now from the synthetic definition of Tragedy, we proceed to analyze the elements that separately demand the attention of the tragic poet. Since there are *dramatis personae* who produce the author's imitation of an action, it necessarily follows that (1) everything pertaining to the appearance of the actors on the stage—including costume, scenery, and the like—will constitute an element in the technique of tragedy; and that (2) the composition of the music ('Melody'), and (3) the composition in words ('Diction'), will constitute two further elements, as Melody and Diction represent the medium in which the action is imitated. By Diction is meant, in this connection, the fitting together of the words in metre;

Six constitutive elements in Tragedy:

1. Spectacle
2. Melody
3. Diction

as for Melody (= 'Song'), the meaning is too obvious to need explanation.

But furthermore, the original object of the imitation is an action of men. In the performance, then, the imitation, which is also an action, must be carried on by agents, the *dramatis personae*. And these agents must necessarily be endowed by the poet with certain distinctive qualities both of (4) Moral Character (*ethos*) and (5) Intellect (*dianoia*)—one might say, of heart and head; for it is from a man's moral bent, and from the way in which he reasons, that we are led to ascribe goodness or badness, success or failure, to his acts. Thus, as there are two natural causes, moral bent and thought, of the particular deeds of men, so there are the same two natural causes of their success or failure in life. And the tragic poet must take cognizance of this.

Finally, the action which the poet imitates is represented in the tragedy by (6) the Fable or Plot. And according to our present distinction, Plot means that synthesis of the particular incidents which gives form or being to the tragedy as a whole; whereas Moral Bent is that which leads us to characterize the agents as morally right or wrong in what they do; and Intellect (or 'Thought') is that which shows itself whenever they prove a particular point, or, it may be, avouch some general truth.

In every tragedy, therefore, there are six constitutive elements, according to the quality of which we judge the excellence of the work as a whole: Plot (6); Moral Disposition (4); Diction (3); Intellect (5); Spectacle (1); Melody (2). Two of them, Melody and Diction, concern

The personality of the agents is resolved into two elements:  
4. Ethos  
5. Dianoia

6. Plot

Summary of the six

the medium of imitation; one, Spectacle, the manner; and three, Plot, Moral Disposition, and Intellect, the objects. There can be no other elements. These constitutive elements, accordingly, not a few of the tragic poets, so to speak, have duly employed [in spite of what adverse critics may assert (see p. 60)]; for, indeed, every drama must contain certain things that are meant for the eye, as well as the elements of Moral Disposition, Plot, Diction, Melody, and Intellect.

[That element of a drama which is here called moral bent or disposition (*ethos*) is often rendered into English by the word 'character.' There is a danger, which Aristotle himself does not always avoid, of confusing character in this narrower sense with personality, and hence of identifying character with agent. From this confusion there often results a misunderstanding of Aristotle's subsequent remarks upon the relative importance of plot and moral bent (character in the narrower sense). In dealing with this point it is undesirable to refer to the *dramatis personae* as 'characters'; one would do well to use the word 'agents' instead, and to bear in mind that the personality of the agents is divided by Aristotle into two separate elements, corresponding to qualities of heart and head respectively. If at first we make the most of this distinction, we shall not go far astray in later passages where it is not so carefully preserved. What Aristotle next specifically maintains is that, among the six elements, plot or action is of greater importance than the moral bent of the agents; he might equally well have said it was of greater importance than their faculty of reason, i.e., than 'Thought.']

Tragedy an  
imitation of  
Action and  
Life

Relation of  
Plot to the  
End of  
Tragedy

Contempo-  
rary art is  
lacking in  
Ethos

The most important of the constitutive elements is the Plot, that is, the organization of the incidents of the story; for Tragedy in its essence is an imitation, not of men as such, but of action and life, of happiness and misery. And happiness and misery are not states of being, but forms of activity; the end for which we live is some form of activity, not the realization of a moral quality. Men are better or worse, according to their moral bent; but they become happy or miserable in their actual deeds. In a play, consequently, the agents do not perform for the sake of representing their individual dispositions; rather, the display of moral character is included as subsidiary to the things that are done. So that the incidents of the action, and the structural ordering of these incidents, constitute the end and purpose of the tragedy. [This structure is the inward 'form' or essence, which corresponds to the outward function, the *catharsis* of pity and fear.] Here, as elsewhere, the final purpose is the main thing.

Such is the importance of this element that, we may add, whereas Tragedy cannot exist without action, it is possible to construct a tragedy in which the agents have no distinctive moral bent. In fact, the works of most of the modern tragic poets, from the time of Euripides on, are lacking in the element of character. Nor is the defect confined to tragic poets: it is common among poets in general. And there is a similar defect among the painters—in Zeuxis, for example, as contrasted with Polygnotus; for Polygnotus excels in the representation of the ethical element, whereas the pictures of Zeuxis are in this respect wholly deficient. [In the same way, one might compare the vigorous delineation of ethical qualities in Rembrandt



with the absence of this power in Rubens. Among English poets of all sorts, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth serve to exemplify the presence of this quality; it is relatively lacking in Dryden, Shelley, and Byron.

Again, one may string together a series of speeches in which the moral bent of the agents is delineated in excellent verse and diction, and with excellent order in the thoughts, and yet fail to produce the essential effect of Tragedy as already described. One is much more likely to produce this effect with a tragedy, however deficient in these respects, if it has a plot—that is, an artistic ordering of the incidents. In addition to all this, the most vital features of Tragedy, by which the interest and emotions of the audience are most powerfully aroused—that is, reversals of fortune, and discoveries of the identity of agents—are parts of the plot or action. It is significant, too, that beginners in the art become proficient in versification and in the delineation of personal traits before they are able to combine the incidents of the action into an effective whole. Herein the progress of the individual dramatist repeats the history of the art; for almost all the early poets succeeded better with these two elements than in the formation of plots.

(1) The Plot, then, is the First Principle, and as it were the very Soul of Tragedy.

(2) And the element of Character is second in importance.—There is a parallel in the art of painting: the most beautiful colors, laid on with no order, will not give as much pleasure as the simplest figure done in outline.—Tragedy is an imitation of an action: mainly on account

Success in portraiture does not produce catharsis. Success with the action does

Reversals and Discoveries belong to the Plot

Mastery of Plot is the artist's final attainment

Compare the history of the tragic art

Central thought of the treatise

Elements in the order of importance:  
1. Plot  
2. Ethos

of this action does it become, in the second place, an imitation of personal agents.

### 3. *Dianoia*

(3) Third in importance comes the Intellectual element. This corresponds to the power of the agent to say what can be said, or what is fitting to be said, in a given situation. It is that element in the speeches of a drama which is supplied by the study of Politics and the art of Rhetoric; for the older tragic poets [e.g., Sophocles] made their heroes express themselves like statesmen, whereas the modern [including Euripides] make theirs use the devices of the rhetoricians. [The utterances which Sophocles puts into the mouth of Oedipus and Creon are simple and statesmanlike; the opening speech of Dionysus in the *Bacchae* of Euripides is rhetorical. One might also compare the address of Othello to the Duke and Senators with the antithetical declamation of Dryden's Aurengzebe on the hollowness of life.] This Intellectual element must be clearly distinguished from the Ethical element in the drama, for the latter includes only such things as reveal the moral bias of the agents—their tendency to choose or to avoid a certain line of action, in cases where the motive is not otherwise evident. And hence the poet has no call to employ the ethical element in speeches where the agent is neither choosing nor avoiding a line of action. The Intellectual element, on the other hand, is manifested in everything the agents say to prove or disprove a special point, and in every utterance they make by way of generalization. [Of course the two elements may show themselves in the same passage. However, the moral bias of Iago is revealed by Shakespeare when Iago resolves upon a monstrous undoing of the Moor. And *dianoia* is man-

Ethos and  
*Dianoia* dif-  
ferentiated  
by their out-  
ward mani-  
festations

ifested when Othello, arguing from the false evidence of the handkerchief, infers that Desdemona is unfaithful. As for generalizations, *dianoia* is exemplified in the maxims uttered by various persons in *Oedipus the King*; thus, the Second Messenger: 'Those griefs smart worst which are seen to be of our own choice.']

(4) Next in importance among the four essential constituents comes the Diction. This, as has been explained, means the interpretation of the sentiments of the agents in the form of language, and is essentially the same thing whether the language is metrical or not. [Compare Wordsworth: 'There neither is, nor can be, any *essential* difference between the language of prose and metrical composition.']

4. Diction

(5) Of the two elements remaining, Melody is the more important, since it occupies the chief place among the accessory pleasures of Tragedy.

5. Melody

(6) The element of Spectacle, though it arouses the interest of the audience, is last in importance, since it demands the lowest order of artistic skill, and is least connected with the art of poetry as such. A tragedy can produce its effect independently of a stage-performance and actors—that is, when it is read; and besides, the business of preparing the stage and the actors is the affair of the costumer rather than of poets.

6. Spectacle

Having thus distinguished the six constitutive elements, we are now to discuss, as the first and most important consideration in the art of Tragedy, the proper organization of the incidents into a plot that will have the ideal tragic effect. According to the definition (p. 17), a tragedy is an imitation of an action that is complete in itself, forming a

CHAPTER 7

Proper construction of the Plot

whole of a sufficient magnitude or extent; for a thing may be a whole and yet wanting in magnitude.

Definitions:  
a Whole

Now a Whole is that which has (1) a Beginning, (2) a Middle, and (3) an End.

A Beginning

(1) A Beginning (= X) is that which does not itself come after anything else in a necessary sequence, but after which some other thing (= Y) does naturally exist or come to pass.

An End

(3) An End (= Z), on the contrary, is that which naturally comes after something else (= Y) in either a necessary or a usual sequence, but has nothing else following it.

A Middle

(2) A Middle (= Y) is that which naturally comes after something else (= X), and is followed by a third thing (= Z).

A well-constructed plot, therefore, can neither begin nor end where and when the poet happens to like. It must conform to the principles just enunciated. [Compare Socrates in the *Phaedrus* of Plato: 'You will allow that every discourse ought to be like a living creature, with a kind of body of its own and a head and feet; there should be both middle and extremities, adapted to one another and to the whole?']

Plot is like  
the structure  
of a living  
organism

And further, as to Magnitude: to be beautiful, a living organism, or any other individual thing made up of parts, must possess not only an orderly arrangement of these parts, but also a proper magnitude; for beauty depends upon these two qualities, size and order. Hence an extremely minute creature cannot be beautiful to us; for we see the whole in an almost infinitesimal moment of time, and lose the pleasure that comes from a distinct percep-

tion of order in the parts. Nor could a creature of vast dimensions be beautiful to us—a beast, say, one thousand miles in length; for in that case the eye could not take all of the object in at once—we should see the parts, but not the unity of the whole. In the same way, then, as an inanimate object made up of parts, or a living creature, must be of such a size that the parts and the whole may be easily taken in by the eye, just so must the plot of a tragedy have a proper length, so that the parts and the whole may be easily embraced by the memory. The artificial limits, of course, as these are determined by the conditions of stage-presentation, and by the power of attention in an audience, do not concern the art of poetry as such. If it were necessary to present one hundred tragedies in succession [an exaggerated illustration], they would doubtless have to be timed with water-clocks—as some say was formerly the custom. The artistic limit, set by the nature of the thing itself, is this: So long as the plot is perspicuous throughout, the greater the length of the story, the more beautiful will it be on account of its magnitude. But to define the matter in a general way, an adequate limit for the magnitude of the plot is this: Let the length be such that the story may pass from happiness to misfortune, or from misfortune to happiness, through a series of incidents linked together in a probable or inevitable sequence.

To be beautiful, it must have magnitude and order, yet not be too large

The natural limit

Artificial limits

The artistic limit

An adequate limit

The Unity of a Plot does not consist, as some suppose, in having one man as subject; for the number of accidents that befall the individual man is endless, and some of them cannot be reduced to unity. So, too, during the life of any one man, he performs many deeds which cannot be

CHAPTER 8

Unity of Hero is not Unity of Plot

Examples of  
the mistake

Homer did  
not make it

brought together in the form of a unified action. We see, therefore, the faulty choice of subject in such poets as have written a *Heracleid* or a *Theseid*, or the like; they suppose that, since Heracles or Theseus was a single person the story of Heracles or Theseus must have unity. [The fault is illustrated in *Beowulf* and in Byron's *Don Juan*.] Homer, on the contrary, whether by conscious art or native insight, evidently understood the correct method, for he excels the rest of the epic poets in this as in all other respects. Thus, in composing a story of Odysseus, he did not make his plot include all that ever happened to Odysseus. For example, it befell Odysseus to receive a gash from a boar on Mount Parnassus; and it befell him also to feign madness at the time of the mustering against Ilium; but what he suffered in the former case and what he did in the latter are incidents between which there was no necessary or probable connection. [And hence the poet did not join them.—As a matter of fact, the first of them has a minor place in the *Odyssey* (Book 19), and the second has none.] Instead of joining disconnected incidents, Homer took for the subject of the *Odyssey* an action with the kind of unity here described [comprising a sequence of events in the delayed return of Odysseus and his vengeance upon the intruders in his house]; and the subject chosen for the *Iliad* is likewise unified. [It is a sequence of events connected with the wrath of Achilles. The plot of *Paradise Lost* also is unified.] For, as in the other imitative arts, painting and the rest, so in poetry, the object of the imitation in each case is a unit; therefore in an epic or a tragedy, the plot, which is an imitation of an action, must represent an action that is organically uni-



fied, the structural order of the incidents being such that transposing or removing any one of them will dislocate and disorganize the whole. Every part must be necessary, and in its place; for a thing whose presence or absence makes no perceptible difference is not an organic part of the whole.

Unity like  
that of a liv-  
ing body

From what has been said, it is clear that the office of the Poet consists in displaying, not what actually has happened, but what in a given situation might well happen—a sequence of events that is possible in the sense of being either credible or inevitable. In other words, the Poet is not a Historian; for the two differ, not in the fact that one writes in metrical, and the other in non-metrical, language. For example, you might turn the work of Herodotus into verse, and it would still be a species of history, with metre no less than without it. The essential distinction lies in this, that the Historian relates what has happened, and the Poet represents what might happen—what is typical. Poetry, therefore, is something more philosophic and of a higher seriousness than History; for Poetry tends rather to express what is universal, whereas History relates particular events as such. [Aristotle could hardly have forgotten the philosophic element at the beginning of Herodotus, or the dramatic organization of events in Thucydides; but as he is distinguishing the general characteristics of poetry and history, he is bound to emphasize the first concern of the historian, namely, the actual events of the past and their actual sequence. The historian does not neglect the chronological order of events when there is no necessary or seeming connection between them; the poet must.] By an exhibition of what is universal or typical

CHAPTER 9

The Poet  
represents  
Ideal Truth

He is not a  
Historian

Poetry more  
philosophic  
than His-  
tory: it is  
Universal

History deals  
with the  
Particular

The Univer-  
sal in the  
New Comedy

The reason  
for particular  
names in  
Tragedy

More rarely,  
names as  
well as inci-  
dents are  
invented

is meant the representation of what a certain type of person is likely or is bound to say or do in a given situation. This is the aim of the Poet, though at the same time he attaches the names of specific persons to the types. As distinguished from the universal, the particular, which is the subject-matter of history, consists of what an actual person, Alcibiades or the like, actually did or underwent. That Poetry represents the universal has become clear enough in the present stage of Comedy [the 'New Comedy']; for the comic poets first combine plots out of probable incidents, and then supply such names for the agents as chance to fit the types—in contrast to the old iambic lampooners, whose method was to begin with particular individuals.

In Tragedy, however, the poets still keep to the names of persons [Orestes, Agamemnon, and the like] who are said to have existed. The reason is that what we accept as true we regard as possible. That which never has come to pass we do not necessarily take to be possible; but what we believe to have happened is manifestly possible—if it were impossible, it would not have occurred. Still, even in Tragedy there are cases where only one or two of the personages are familiar, the rest having names invented by the poet; and there are yet other plays where none of the names are familiar. Such is the *Antheus* of Agathon, in which both the incidents and the names were devised by the poet; nor do they give less pleasure on that account. Accordingly, in his choice of subjects no poet is rigorously bound to adhere to the traditional stories upon which tragedies have been written. Indeed, it would be absurd to feel so constrained, since even such stories as are tradi-

tional are familiar to but few, and yet give pleasure to any one. [Shakespeare for the most part took subjects in some measure traditional; for example, *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar*.]

From all this it is evident that the Poet [the Greek word signifies 'Maker'] is a maker of plots more than a maker of verses, inasmuch as he is a poet by virtue of imitating some object, and the objects he imitates are actions. And even if he happens to take a subject from history, he is none the less a poet for that; for there is nothing to hinder certain actual events from possessing the ideal quality of a probable or necessary sequence; and it is by virtue of representing this quality in such events that he is their poet.

Plots and actions, as we shall see, are either Involved or Uninvolved. Of the uninvolved, the purely episodic plots are the worst, a plot being called 'episodic' when there is neither probability nor necessity in the sequence of incident. [Such a plot is that of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*.] A bad poet will construct this kind of plot through his own want of insight; a good poet, in order to meet the requirements of the actors. Since his work must be presented on the stage, and occupy a certain length of time, a good poet often stretches out the plot beyond its inherent capacity, and by the insertion of unnecessary matter is forced to distort the proper sequence of incident.

But to proceed with the parts of the definition of Tragedy. Tragedy is an imitation not only of a complete action, but of incidents that arouse pity and fear; and such incidents affect us most powerfully when we are not expecting them, if at the same time they are caused by one

The Poet  
primarily  
constructive

Episodic  
plots are the  
worst

Pity and  
Fear aroused  
by an unex-  
pected out-  
come having  
an air of  
design

another. For we are struck with more wonder if we find a causal relation in unexpected tragic occurrences than if they came about of themselves and in no special sequence; since even pure coincidences seem most marvelous if there is something that looks like design in them. For example, while the man who had been the cause of Mity's death was looking at Mity's statue in Argos, the statue fell over and killed him; such things do not impress people as being the result of mere chance. Plots, therefore, that illustrate the principle of necessity or probability in the sequence of incident are better than others.

## CHAPTER 10

Uninvolved  
Plot de-  
scribed

But plots are either Uninvolved or Involved, since the actions which are imitated in the plots may readily be divided into the same two classes. Now we may call an action Uninvolved when the incidents follow one another, as explained above, in a single continuous movement [if there once was a definition (p. 33), it now is missing]; that is, when the change of fortune comes about without a Reversal of Situation and without a Discovery (or identification) of some person or fact at first unrecognized. [Such an action is represented in the *Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus.] An Involved action is one in which the change of fortune is attended by such Reversal, or by such Discovery, or by both. And each of these two incidents should arise from the structure of the plot itself; that is, each should be the necessary or probable result of the incidents that have gone before, and not merely follow them in point of time—for in the sequence of events there is a vast difference between *post hoc* and *propter hoc*.

An Involved  
Plot or Action

## CHAPTER 11

A Reversal of Situation is a change in some part of the

action from one state of affairs to its precise opposite—as has been said (p. 29), from good fortune to ill, or from ill to good; and a change that takes place in the manner just described, namely, in a necessary or probable sequence of incident. To illustrate: in the *Oedipus the King* of Sophocles, the Messenger comes to cheer Oedipus by removing his fears as to his parentage on his mother's side, but, by disclosing whose son Oedipus really is, brings about the opposite state of affairs for him—that is, brings about the change from happiness to misery. [The illustration as the treatise gives it does not exactly coincide with the situation in the tragedy as we know it.—A reversal may constitute the main turning-point of a drama, as in *Macbeth*, where the murder of Duncan brings about the opposite of what Macbeth intends; or it may be subsidiary, as in *King Lear*, where the promise of good fortune in the coming of the army from France turns to further misery for Lear through the defeat of this army and the death of Cordelia.] Of the opposite change, from misery to happiness, there is an example in the *Lynceus* of Theodectes: when Lynceus is being led off to die, and Danaus follows to be his executioner, it comes about, as a result of the previous incidents of the drama, that Lynceus is saved and Danaus executed. [Inasmuch as Danaus also suffers a change of fortune, this instance likewise illustrates the twofold reversal in opposite directions. A similar case in Shakespeare is the reversal in Act 4 of *The Merchant of Venice*: here the argument of Portia at first cheers Shylock and discourages Antonio, but eventually frees Antonio from the dread of death and plunges Shylock into misery.]

Reversal or  
Peripetia



Discovery  
defined

The best form  
of Discovery

A Discovery, as the word itself indicates, is a transition from ignorance to knowledge, and hence a passing into love or hate on the part of those agents who are marked for happiness or misfortune. The best form of Discovery is a recognition of the identity of persons, attended by reversals of fortune—such a reversal as attends the Discovery of Oedipus' true parentage in *Oedipus the King*. [A recognition, with a reversal of fortune from bad to good, occurs in the Biblical story of Joseph, when the Governor of Egypt is revealed to the other sons of Jacob as their brother, occasioning love between the agents, and a change for the family of Joseph from misery to happiness.] There are, of course, other forms of Discovery besides this; some such transition from ignorance to knowledge may come about with reference to inanimate, even casual things. [A suggested discovery of something trivial is found in *The Marble Faun* of Hawthorne; though one never learns whether Donatello had, or had not, pointed ears.] It is also possible to discover whether some person has done, or not done, a particular deed [for example, whether it was Oedipus who killed Laius]. But the form of Discovery most intimately connected with the plot, and with the action imitated, is the one we have specially mentioned; for the Discovery bringing love or hate, and the Reversal bringing happiness or misery, will occasion either pity or fear; and by our definition it is these emotions that the tragic imitation is to arouse. Furthermore, this kind of Discovery will be instrumental in bringing about the happy or unhappy ending of the action as a whole. Now since, in this case, the Discovery means a recognition of persons [rather than objects or deeds],



there are two possibilities: (1) X may learn the identity of Y, when Y already knows the identity of X; or (2) X and Y may each have to learn the identity of the other. [Thus (1) in the *Odyssey* Odysseus knows the identity of Polyphemus; but Polyphemus does not know that of Odysseus. The hero, however, foolishly reveals his own name to Polyphemus, who is then enabled to call down the wrath of Poseidon upon 'Odysseus, the son of Laertes.' Similarly, Joseph knew his brethren when they appeared in Egypt, but eventually revealed himself to them.] (2) An example of the second possibility is in Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians*: Iphigenia is made known to Orestes through her desire to send a letter in her own name to 'Orestes, son of Agamemnon'; and another Discovery is required to reveal Orestes to her.

Two possibilities in Discovery

Two parts of the plot, then, Reversal and Discovery, represent these things in the action, and have been sufficiently explained. A third part is Suffering [the 'moving accident']: this may be defined as an incident of a destructive or painful sort, such as violent death, physical agony, woundings, and the like. [In *Oedipus the King*, the suicide of Jocasta, and the blinding of Oedipus, self-inflicted, fall under the head of 'Suffering'; in *Othello*, the murder of Desdemona, and the suicide of the Moor.]

Parts of the Plot:

1. Reversal
2. Discovery
3. Suffering

Mention previously was made (pp. 21 ff.) of the six parts of Tragedy as a whole—those six formative elements which are to be used by the poet. We come now to the division of a tragedy into its quantitative parts—the members that may be separated in the text (see p. 18). These are: (1) Prologue; (2) Episode; (3) Exode; (4) Choric Song; this choral portion being divided into (a) Parode

CHAPTER 12

Formative Elements of Tragedy

Quantitative Parts of Tragedy

and (b) Stasimon. These divisions are common to all tragedies. [What Aristotle next says of the choral portion doubtless applied rather to Greek tragedy after Euripides than to such elder dramatists as are known to us.] Though Parode and Stasimon, with the other divisions, are common to all, in some tragedies only are there (c) Songs from the Stage by one or more of the actors (i.e., not by the Chorus), and Commoi, or songs by the actors and Chorus together.

(1) The Prologue is the entire part of the tragedy from the beginning to the Parode of the Chorus.

(2) An Episode is one of those entire parts of a tragedy, each of which intervenes between two whole choral songs.

(3) The Exode is that entire part of a tragedy which follows after the last choral song, and reaches to the end.

(4) Of the choral portion, (a) the Parode is the first undivided utterance of the Chorus; (b) a Stasimon is a song of the Chorus, not in anapaestic or trochaic metre; and (c) a Commos is a song of lamentation in which the Chorus and one or more actors unite.

These, then, are the parts into which Tragedy is divided quantitatively, or according to its sections. The parts which are to be employed as formative elements have already been mentioned.

#### CHAPTER 13

The ideal  
structure for  
the function  
of Tragedy

Following what has been said up to this point (esp. pp. 33-37), we must next discuss that ideal structure of the plot which will bring about the fullest measure of tragic effect. (1) What is the poet to aim at, and what is he to avoid, in the construction of his plots? In other

words, (2) what are the specific sources of the tragic *ca-tharsis*?

In the most perfect tragedy, as we have seen (pp. 25, 33-35), the synthesis of the incidents must be, not uninvolved, but involved, and this synthesis must be imitative of events that arouse pity and fear—for therein lies the distinctive function of this kind of imitation. When we take this function as a standard, it is clear that there are three forms of plot to be avoided. (1) Good and just men are not to be represented as falling from happiness into misery; for such a spectacle does not arouse fear or pity in us—it is simply revolting. (2) Nor must evil men be represented as rising from ill fortune to prosperity; for this is the most untragic situation of all. It does not stir our general human sympathy, nor arouse tragic pity or tragic fear. (3) Nor, again, may an excessively wicked man be represented as falling from prosperity into misfortune. Such a course of events may arouse in us some measure of human sympathy, but not the emotions of pity and fear. For, to define: Pity is what we feel at a misfortune that is out of proportion to the faults of a man; and Fear is what we feel when misfortune comes upon one like ourselves. Now the excessively wicked man deserves misery in proportion; and since his wickedness exceeds the average, he is not like one of ourselves. Accordingly, in this third situation there is nothing to arouse either pity or fear. There remains, then, (4) the case of the man intermediate between these extremes: a man not superlatively good and just, nor yet one whose misfortune comes about through vice and depravity; but a man who is brought low

Three forms  
of plot to be  
avoided

Definition of  
Pity

Of Fear

A fourth,  
ideal situ-  
ation

through some error of judgment or shortcoming, one from the number of the highly renowned and prosperous—such a person as Oedipus of the line of Thebes, Thyestes of Pelops' line, and the eminent men of other noted families.

[For many, the tragic flaw in an agent, described as an 'error of judgment,' or a 'shortcoming,' needs immediate illustration. The single Greek word, *hamartia*, lays the emphasis upon the want of insight within the man, but is elastic enough to mean also the outward fault resulting from it. In the *Odyssey*, Book I, the human frailty which is said to bring sufferings beyond the ordinary lot of men is represented in translation by 'blindness of heart.' In much the same way, Sophocles makes Creon, in *Antigone*, attribute the woes that have come upon him and his household to 'the wretched blindness of my counsels'; and the Sophoclean story of Oedipus turns upon a certain blindness of impulse, which at length is recognized by the man himself—whereupon he puts out his own eyes.

In general, we have primarily to do with a certain moral bent in an agent, toward goodness in the main, but undisciplined; hence a shortcoming which tends to show itself in faulty action at critical points in his career. If right action is the result of sympathetic insight, as in the poet himself, faulty action in an agent may be described as the result of the opposite quality; and this quality will have a dual nature, compounded of something in the 'head' and something in the 'heart' of the agent—in other words, the quality will be 'blindness of heart.' Under this general flaw may be gathered the specific flaws of various heroes, for example: 'the wrath of Achilles' in the *Iliad*; the overweening curiosity and presumption of Odysseus in the en-

counter with the Cyclops; 'Man's first disobedience' in *Paradise Lost*; the jealousy of Othello; the ambition of Macbeth; the rashness of Lear. It is this flaw in the inward eye which mars the vision of agents whose penetration otherwise is keen, such as Oedipus and Hamlet, making their outward activity at critical junctures sometimes too slow and sometimes too hasty.

The conception in the *Poetics* of an ideal tragic person with his imperfect insight, proper for tragedy, may be contrasted with the ideal man of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, whose natural bent has been corrected, whose clarity of judgment enables him to perform the right action at the right time, and whose career, as a result, is likely to be prosperous.]


To be perfectly tragic, accordingly, the Plot must not, as some hold, have a double issue, fortunate for the good, unfortunate for the bad, but a single one. And the change of fortune must be, not a rise from misery to happiness, but just the contrary, a fall from happiness to misery; and this fall must come about, not through depravity, but through a serious defect in judgment, or shortcoming in conduct, in a person either as good as the average of mankind, or better than that rather than worse. In support of this view the history of the drama itself is significant. In the early days the tragic poets were satisfied with any stories that came in their way; but now the practice has narrowed down to traditions concerning a few houses, and the best tragedies are founded on the legends of Alcmeon, Oedipus, Orestes, Meleager, Thyestes, Telephus, and similar personages who have been either the movers or the victims in some signal overthrow of fortune. From prac-

The single,  
unhappy  
issue is best

Traditional  
tales of  
tragic down-  
fall



Euripides'  
choice of  
unhappy  
endings is  
right

tice as well as theory, then, we argue that the ideal tragedy will have a plot of this type. Those critics, therefore, are in error who blame Euripides for adhering to this plan in his tragedies, since many of them have the unhappy ending. It is, as we have said, the correct procedure. And the best proof of its correctness is this: when they are put upon the stage and acted, such plays, if they have been properly worked out, are seen to have the most tragic effect; and Euripides, even if his procedure be faulty in every other respect [as some maintain], is yet, through the unhappy ending, certainly the most tragic of poets on the stage. 

The double  
ending not  
so good

Second in excellence comes the form of construction which some of the critics rank first, where the thread of the plot is double, as in the *Odyssey*, and there is a happy and an unhappy ending for the better and the worse agents respectively. It is rated first, however, only through the inability of the general audience to endure the highest tragic tension; for the poets follow the general taste, and cater to the wishes of the spectators. But the pleasure arising from this double structure is not the distinctive pleasure of Tragedy. It is rather one that belongs to Comedy, where the deadliest of legendary foes, like Orestes and Aegisthus, become friends, and quit the stage without any one slaying or being slain. [*Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello* furnish examples of the tragic ending. In *The Merchant of Venice* we have the double issue for the good and bad. In many of Scott's novels, *Ivanhoe*, for instance, the author, sharing the weakness of the public, avoids the single unhappy ending. *The Bride of Lammermoor*, however, is tragic in the Aristotelian sense.]



## CHAPTER 14

The effect of fear and pity may be produced by means that pertain simply to stage-presentation [such as the dreadful costume and menacing attitudes of the Furies, or the wretched appearance of Telephus, or of Lear in the storm]; but it may also arise from the structure and incidents of the tragedy, which is the preferable way, and is the mark of a better poet. For the Plot should be so constructed that, even without help from the eye, one who simply hears the play recited must feel the chill of fear, and be stirred with pity, at what occurs. In fact, these are just the emotions one would feel in listening to the story of *Oedipus the King* [or *Othello*] off the stage. To bring about this emotional effect by spectacular means is less a matter of the poetic art, and depends upon adventitious assistance. But those who employ the means of the stage to produce what strikes us as being merely monstrous, without being terrible, are absolute strangers to the art of Tragedy; for not every kind of pleasure is to be sought from a tragedy, but only that specific pleasure which is characteristic of this art.

Tragic effect through spectacular means is less artistic

The effect is psycho-physiological

[Aristotle is passing from the first of the two considerations mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 13 (p. 38) to the second; that is, from the question, What is the poet to aim at, and to avoid, in the general construction of his plots? to the question, What are the specific sources of the tragic *catharsis*? Obviously, the questions are interdependent, yet they may be distinguished.]

Since the pleasure which is characteristic of Tragedy comes from the arousing of pity and fear, and since the poet must produce this pleasure through an imitation of some action, it is clear that the tragic quality must be

Specific  
sources of  
Pity and  
Fear

A deed of  
horror in-  
volving  
blood-rela-  
tions

The poet is  
to be guided  
by tradition,  
but he must  
select and  
manipulate  
with skill

Various  
possibilities

impressed upon the incidents that make up the story. Let us consider, then, what kinds of occurrence strike us as terrible, or rather what kinds of terrible occurrences strike us as piteous. When persons are involved in some deed of horror, they must be either (1) friends, or (2) enemies, or (3) indifferent to one another. Now when (2) an enemy injures, or wishes to injure, an enemy, there is nothing to arouse our pity either in his deed or his intention, except in so far as concerns the suffering of the one who is injured. And the same is true when (3) the persons are indifferent to each other. But when (1) the tragic incident (i.e., 'Suffering'—see p. 37) occurs within the circle of those who are bound by natural ties—when murder or the like is done or intended by brother upon brother, son upon father, mother upon son, or son upon mother,—pity is aroused; and such are the situations the tragic poet must look for in the traditional stories. The general framework of these stories, then, the poet must not disturb: Clytaemnestra must be slain by her son Orestes, and Eriphyle by her son Alcmeon. At the same time, the poet must select for himself from the materials of tradition, and he must employ the given materials with skill.

Let us explain more clearly what is meant by the skilful use of material; for example, the tale of a deed of violence among friends. This may be treated in several ways. The deed may be done, as in the early poets, (1) by a person aware of what he is doing, to another who knows the identity of the doer, as is the case also in Euripides; for he makes Medea kill her children with premeditation, while they recognize her as their slayer. [Similarly in Shakespeare, Othello of set purpose kills his wife, and she recog-

nizes her husband as her murderer.] Or the deed may be done (2) by persons ignorant of the terrible nature of what they are doing, who afterwards discover their relationship with the victims; as Oedipus, in Sophocles' version of the tale, kills a man who he subsequently learns was his father. In this case, however, the deed lies outside of the drama proper. But it may be included in the drama; as Alcmeon unwittingly kills his mother Eriphyle in the version of that story by Astydamos; or as Telegonus injures his unrecognized father in the *Odysseus Wounded* of (?) Sophocles. Still a third possibility of treatment is this: (3) a person meditating some irreparable injury to another, unaware of their relationship, may discover the identity of his victim in time to avoid the deed. [A variation of the first possibility is to intend some injury to a near relation whose identity is known, and then to draw back from the deed.] This list exhausts the possible ways of treating the material in question; for the deed must either be done, or not done; and the persons must either be aware, or not aware, of what they are doing.

Of all the possibilities, the worst is the situation in which some one, aware of the relationship, is about to do another a deadly injury, and does not do it. The situation is revolting to our sense of natural affection; and it is not tragic—pity is not aroused—because the intended victim does not suffer. Accordingly, the personages of Tragedy do not act in this way save in rare instances—as when Haemon, in Sophocles' *Antigone*, pursues his father Creon with intent to kill, and then desists. [In Shakespeare, Hamlet seems about to kill his uncle at prayer, and then refrains. This and other instances of inaction in the same

The least  
tragic possi-  
bility

A better  
situation

A still  
better one

The best sit-  
uation of all

play are in keeping with Hamlet's 'moral bent.' Aristotle would distinguish between the artistic handling of the incident and the wrong choice of such incidents to begin with.] A second situation, not so bad, is that in which the victim is known, as in the first case, but the act which is intended is also performed [as in *The Libation-Pourers* of Aeschylus, where Orestes fulfils his purpose of killing his mother, Clytaemnestra]. Better yet is the situation where the deed is done by a person who does not recognize his victim, and discovers the relationship afterwards; for this is not revolting to our sense of natural affection, and the Discovery will have the proper effect of astounding us. [This is the situation in *Oedipus the King*.] But the best of all is the third of the possible methods of treatment. This is exemplified in the *Cresphontes* of Euripides, where Merope is about to slay her son, and does not slay him, but discovers his identity; in the same author's *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, where the sister, Iphigenia, is about to sacrifice her brother, Orestes, but discovers who he is before it is too late; and in the *Helle*, where the son is on the point of giving up his mother [? to the enemy], and recognizes her just in time.

[It is difficult to explain the discrepancy between this preference of an imminent horror with a happy issue and the equally decided preference in Chapter 13 (e.g., pp. 41-42) of a plot with an unhappy ending. There, it is true, Aristotle was thinking of the course and effect of the tragedy as a whole, and here he is thinking of the emotional effect of a specific incident within the tragedy; his examples of the various situations seem to show that it may or may not be the basic incident of the whole work. To

have an imminent horror with a happy issue as the crucial incident in a tragedy would seem to be incompatible with an unhappy ending of the play as a whole. In the most nearly perfect tragedy Aristotle knows, *Oedipus the King*, which yet comes short of the ideal tragedy of the *Poetics*, the basic incident of horror is treated in the second-best way, the deed being done in ignorance, and the discovery coming later. As the killing of his father by Oedipus thus lies among the events anterior to the drama proper, the shock to our sense of natural affection is diminished, yet the play can end unhappily.]

The fact that the traditional stories must be kept as they are, and that the deed of horror must preferably be treated in one way rather than another, will explain why tragedies, as we noted above (p. 41), have come to be restricted to the tales of a few families only. In searching the old stories for themes, it was through fortune rather than art that the poets came to embody incidents of this tragic kind in their plots. And for want of invention, they are still obliged to have recourse to the tales of those families in which such deeds of horror occurred.

In our consideration of tragic effect, enough has now been said concerning the proper synthesis of the incidents in the plot, and the kind of stories to be used as materials.

We turn, then, to the moral dispositions of the agents. In respect to these, there are four things for the poet to aim at. First and foremost, the agents must be (1) good. The Ethical element will be present in a tragedy if, as was said (pp. 25, 26), by speech or act the agents manifest a certain moral bent in what they choose to do or

CHAPTER 15

The Ethos of  
the agents  
must be good



It must be  
True to Type

True to Life

Self-con-  
sistent

avoid; and the *ethos* will be good if the habit of choice is good. ['Good' means naturally kind and generous, as well as good for something.] Such goodness is possible in all types of humanity—even in a woman or a slave, though woman is perhaps an inferior type, and the slave quite worthless. (2) They must be true to type. There is, for example, a type of manly valor and eloquence; but it would be inappropriate for the poet to represent a woman as valorous in this way, or as masterly in argument. (3) Thirdly, they must be true to life, which is something different from making them good or true to type, as these terms have just been defined. (4) Fourthly, they must be consistent, true to their own nature throughout the play. Even if the original person whom the poet is representing (as Achilles) should happen to be inconsistent, and should be taken as an example of that type, still the representation should be consistently inconsistent. It must have unity.

The following are illustrations of a failure to observe one or other of these four principles. There is an instance (1) of baseness—a baseness not required by the plot—in the person of Menelaus in Euripides' *Orestes*; an example (2) of what is unsuitable and untrue to type [in this case the manly type] in the lament of Odysseus in the *Scylla* of (?) Timotheus; and another [in this case the feminine type] in the too masterly speech by the heroine in Euripides' *Melanippe the Wise*; and an example [see No. 4, above] of inconsistency in Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*. In this, the Iphigenia who at first pleads for her life is by no means the same sort of individual as the Iphigenia who later is ready to meet her death. [No ex-



ample is given of No. 3, what is untrue to real life; the notion of this kind of propriety is implicit in the next paragraph. We may add some examples of all four defects: (1) of a baseness beyond what is necessary for the plot, in the Edmund and Regan of *King Lear*; (2) of what is inappropriate to the manly type, in the Richard of *King Richard the Second*, and to the womanly, Aristotle might say, in the clever speech of Portia at the trial in *The Merchant of Venice*; (3) of inconsistency, in the Oliver at the beginning and end of *As You Like It*; (4) of what is untrue to life, in the personages of Shelley's *Cenci* throughout.]

As in combining the incidents of the plot, so also in representing the character of the agents, the poet must seek after a necessary or probable relation between one thing and another. That is, a certain kind of person must speak or act in a certain fashion as the necessary or probable outcome of his inward nature; and thus one thing will follow another in a necessary or probable sequence.—From this it is clear that the solution of dramatic situations should come to pass from the progress of the story itself; it should not be brought about by a mechanical device (like the *Deus ex Machina*), as when Euripides' *Medea* is concluded by the escape of the heroine in an aerial chariot drawn by dragons, or as in the *Iliad*, Book 2, where the Greeks are withheld from a premature homeward voyage through the intervention of the goddess. These arbitrary devices must be reserved for matters lying outside of the drama proper, to explain such occurrences in the past as are beyond the range of human knowledge (for example, in a prologue by a god), or

The inner man and the succession of his words and acts

Digression: natural sequence, not mechanical artifice

The place for the supernatural

For the  
irrational

such events in the future as need to be foretold and announced;—for we credit the gods with seeing all things, both past and future. In the events of the drama itself there should be nothing that does not square with our reason; but if an irrational element cannot be avoided, it must lie outside of the tragedy proper, as in the case of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. [Long before the opening of this drama, Oedipus unwittingly killed his father Laius, King of Thebes. On reaching Thebes, he was himself made King, unwittingly married his own mother, the Queen, and reigned in ignorance of the facts for a period of years, this ignorance being essential to the plot. In Aristotle's view, it is 'improbable' that Oedipus never should have learned the circumstances attending the death of his own predecessor; but, lying among the antecedents of the drama proper, the irrational element does not obtrude itself upon our notice. It may be added that Sophocles represents Oedipus as a man who, though astute, has a sluggish mind for obvious things until some external stimulus plunges him into an over-hasty investigation.—There is an irrational element in the story of the pound of flesh in *The Merchant of Venice*; and to Shakespeare's age it might seem 'improbable' that a Jew should be allowed to push his claim for such a bond in open court.—After this digression on mechanical artifice and the irrational, Aristotle further discusses the proper representation of the agents.]

Since Tragedy is an imitation of men better than the ordinary, it is necessary for the tragic poet to observe the method of good portrait-painters; for they reproduce the distinctive features of the original, and yet, while pre-

serving the likeness of a man, ennoble him in the picture. So, too, the poet in imitating men who are quick to anger, or are easy-going, or have other infirmities of disposition, must represent them as such, and yet as kind and honorable. [There is a jotting in the Greek text for an example of tragic obstinacy; it refers to Achilles, who was 'quick to anger' and hard, yet kind and noble.] Thus Homer represents Achilles as good, yet a marvel of hardness. [Compare Ruskin: 'The main features in the character of Achilles are its intense desire of justice and its tenderness of affection. And in that bitter song of the *Iliad*, this man, though aided continually by the wisest of the gods, and burning with the desire of justice in his heart, becomes yet, through ill-governed passion, the most unjust of men; and, full of the deepest tenderness in his heart, becomes yet, through ill-governed passion, the most cruel of men.' Ruskin, we see, changes the emphasis, not only of Aristotle, but of the *Iliad* itself, the first word of which is 'Wrath.' Achilles' obstinate anger, the cause of the main action, is relieved and ennobled by other traits such as Ruskin describes. In like manner, Shakespeare depicts the jealousy of Othello, but makes him otherwise kind and honorable.]

The poet  
must depict  
the tragic  
flaw, yet  
ennoble the  
character

These principles the tragic poet must continually bear in mind, and, in addition, such principles of stage-effect as are necessarily dependent upon the art of poetry [as contrasted with the art of the costumer, or the like]; since here also it is often possible to make mistakes. On this head, however, enough has been said in a work already published. [The reference may be to the lost dialogue of Aristotle *On Poets*.]

## CHAPTER 16

Discovery:  
Six species1. By Marks  
or Tokens

The general nature of Discovery has been explained above (pp. 36–37). We may now examine the several species. (1) The first and least artistic kind of Discovery, which at the same time is the one most frequently employed—owing to a lack of invention in the poets,—is recognition by marks or tokens. Of these, some are congenital, such as ‘the spear-head the Earth-born have on them,’ or bright stars like those that Carcinus employs in his *Thyestes*—a birthmark on the shoulder of the race of Pelops. Others, again, are acquired after birth; and of this class, some are marks on the body, as scars, and some are external tokens, necklaces, etc., and things like the ark, in which the sons of Tyro were exposed, that brings about the discovery in Sophocles’ *Tyro*. [The objection to these means of recognition lies in the fact that they are mechanical devices, and savor of the ‘improbable.’ The recognition should arise as a probable or necessary consequence of the antecedent events in the drama. Bodily marks are convincing evidence of identity to a certain type of mind—for example, to doubting Thomas in the New Testament. An instance of the use of external tokens is in *The Winter’s Tale*: ‘The Mantle of Queen Hermione, her jewel about the neck of it, the letters of Antigonus found with it, which they know to be his character.’] Even these marks or tokens, however, may be used by the poet in a better way or a worse. Thus the hero in the *Odyssey* is made known, through his scar, in one way to the nurse [that is, in the natural course of things, when in the *Bath Scene* she comes to wash the limb], and in another way to the herdsmen [that is, in a worse, because more arbitrary, fashion, since Odysseus displays the scar

in order to convince them of his identity]. Those discoveries are less artistic in which signs are used as a final means of convincement, and so are all such as require a formal proof of identity; those are better in which the recognition comes about by a natural turn of events, as in the *Bath Scene*.

The second kind are Discoveries arbitrarily introduced by the poet [that is, again, not growing out of the sequence of events], and for that reason inartistic. Thus in *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, Euripides simply makes Orestes disclose his own identity; and whereas his sister reveals who she is in a natural way, by trying to send the letter to Orestes, the latter is made to say what the poet wishes, and not what the sequence of events might demand. Accordingly, this fault is not far removed from the one just mentioned, since Orestes could easily have been made to establish his identity with tokens also. A similar instance is the 'voice of the shuttle' in Sophocles' *Tereus* [by which was disclosed the wrong that had been done to Philomela—an arbitrary disclosure, not arising from the antecedent part of the play].

2. Arbitrary Discoveries other than by tokens

The third kind is Discovery through the memory, when the inward man, stirred by hearing or seeing something familiar, is led to display his feelings. For example, in the *Cypria* of Dicaeogenes, the hero bursts into tears when he sees the picture. And in the *Lay of Alcinous* in the *Odyssey*, when he hears the harper chant the adventure of the wooden horse, Odysseus is reminded of the past, and weeps; and thus, in both cases, there comes about a recognition. [In the case of Odysseus, Alcinous, seeing him weep at a tale of the heroes at Ilium, inquires, and

3. Discovery through Memories

receives a direct answer, concerning his identity. In Book 4 of *Paradise Lost*, Satan, beholding Eden and the glory of the sun, recalls his own former happiness and glory, and through 'the bitter memorie of what he was' becomes disfigured with passion; whereupon 'his gestures fierce . . . and mad demeanor' are marked by Uriel, eventually leading to a recognition of Satan by all the guardian angels.]

4. Discovery  
by Inference

The fourth kind is Discovery by a process of reasoning. One example is in *The Libation-Pourers* of Aeschylus, where Electra in effect argues thus: 'Some one with hair like mine has come; no one has hair like mine but Orestes; therefore it is he that has come.' Another is the suggestion made by Polyidus the Sophist for the second discovery in *Iphigenia among the Taurians*; it would be natural for Orestes to reflect: 'My sister was sacrificed at Aulis, and now it is my lot to be sacrificed also'; whereupon Iphigenia would recognize him as her brother. [In this way, the discovery would be brought about, not by a meretricious expedient (see p. 53, No. 2), but in a more 'probable' way; still, not as a result of preceding events in this drama.] Another is that in the *Tydeus* of Theodectes, where the father says: 'I who came to find a son, am myself to perish'—and thus discloses his identity. Still another is that in *The Daughters of Phineus*. In this, the women, when they saw the place, inferred what was to be their fate: 'We were exposed here, and here too we are to die.' [? Whereupon they were recognized.]

5. Fancied  
Discovery  
caused by  
sophistical  
deception

Related to Discovery by inference is a kind of 'fictitious Discovery' where the poet causes A to be recognized by B through the false inference of B [or through a logical



deception practised upon B by A]. There is a case of this in *Odysseus with the False Tidings* [? i.e., Odysseus in disguise, bringing false tidings of himself], where he [? Odysseus in the garb of a Beggar] says: 'I shall know the bow'—which [? as Beggar] he had not seen; but to depict the other person as recognizing Odysseus from this is, for the poet, to represent a false inference. [Compare what is said (pp. 79–80) on the right or poetical way of representing a lie. The form of reference to *Odysseus with the False Tidings* recalls Aristotle's manner of referring to the books or lays of the *Odyssey*, and hence may indicate a lay in some lost epic, if not in a lost version of the *Odyssey* itself. Doubtless the 'fictitious' recognition should be illustrated from Book 23 of the *Odyssey* as we have it, where the hero reveals his identity to his doubting spouse. Odysseus says in effect: 'I shall so describe our nuptial bed'—which as Beggar he had not seen—'that you will know it is Odysseus who is speaking.' His circumstantial description of the bed, which he could give if he were her husband, leads her, not to the legitimate inference that he *might* be her husband, but to the unwarranted inference that he *must* be. In other words, a recognition is effected through a logical fallacy.]

But of all Discoveries, the best is the kind that grows out of the very nature of the incidents, when an astounding revelation comes about from probable antecedents, as in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. And there is an example in *Iphigenia among the Taurians* (when his sister is revealed to Orestes), since it is natural she should wish to dispatch a letter home. Among the discoveries in this class are the only ones that dispense with arbitrary indi-

6. The best form of Discovery arises from the action itself

cations of identity and necklaces, etc. [This is scarcely true.] The next best are those (see No. 4) that come about through a process of reasoning. [Compare the rest of the passage cited under No. 1 from *The Winter's Tale*: 'The majesty of the creature in resemblance of the mother, the affection of nobleness which nature shows above her breeding, and many other evidences proclaim her with all certainty to be the king's daughter.' However the discovery as a whole falls under the censure of No. 1.]

## CHAPTER 17

Practical  
hints for the  
work of  
composing

1. How to  
avoid incon-  
gruities in  
the action

When actually constructing his Plots and elaborating them in the Diction, the poet should endeavor as far as he can to visualize what he is representing. In this way, seeing everything with the utmost vividness, just as if he were an actual spectator of the events he is portraying, he will devise what is suitable, and run the least danger of overlooking inconsistencies. The need of such a practice is shown by the fault that brought down censure upon Carcinus, when he made Amphiarus return from the temple; an inconsistency which would escape the notice of one who was not visualizing. On the stage, however, the play was a failure, for the audience took offense at the oversight. [It is impossible to explain wherein the inconsistency lay.—Bradley has called attention to the number and grossness of the incongruities in *King Lear*; for example: 'Why in the world should Gloucester, when expelled from his castle, wander painfully all the way to Dover, simply in order to destroy himself?' That is to say, perhaps Shakespeare here failed to visualize the action.]

2. How to  
succeed in  
delineating  
emotion

So far as he is able, the poet should also assume the very attitudes and gestures appropriate to the emotions of the agents; for among authors with the same natural

ability, they will be most convincing who themselves experience the feelings they represent. The poet who himself feels distress or anger will represent distress or anger with the most lifelike reality. [Compare Burke: 'I have often observed that on mimicking the looks and gestures of angry, or placid, or frightened, or daring men, I have involuntarily found my mind turned to that passion whose appearance I endeavored to imitate; nay, I am convinced it is hard to avoid it, though one strove to separate the passion from its correspondent gestures.'] Hence the art of poetry requires rather a certain natural plasticity in the poet, than a touch of madness. Poets of the first sort readily assume one personality after another; those of the second involuntarily pass into various states of emotional excitement. [This important distinction is often neglected in discussions on the nature of the poet—as if the poetic temperament were the same in all. One might instance Shakespeare as a poet of the plastic sort, and Marlowe as the kind with a touch of madness.]

Two kinds  
of poetic  
temperament

As for the story, whether it be traditional or his own invention, the poet should first make a general brief or outline of the whole, and then extend this by the insertion of episodes. How one may take a bird's-eye view of the whole may be illustrated from Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, the general plan of which is this:

First one  
must make  
an outline  
sketch

A certain maiden has been offered in sacrifice; has mysteriously vanished from the sight of those who were sacrificing her; and has been transported to a foreign land, where it is the custom to offer up all strangers to the goddess. Here she is appointed priestess of this rite. Some time later it chances that the brother of this priestess arrives.—The fact, however, that the oracle for a certain reason bade him go thither does not lie within the general plan of the story,

and his design of obedience in coming is outside of the drama proper.—Upon his arrival he is seized, and, on the point of being sacrificed, reveals his identity; either as Euripides arbitrarily makes him disclose it himself, or, following the suggestion of Polyidus, by the not unnatural reflection: 'As my sister was offered in sacrifice, so must I be also'; and so the Discovery leads to his preservation.

Then fill in  
the episodes

When the general outline has been determined, and fitting traditional names have been supplied for the agents, the next thing is to fill in the scheme with particular episodes. Now care must be taken that the episodes are appropriate to the action and the agents. In *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, for example, Orestes' fit of madness, leading to his capture, is an appropriate episode [since it is in keeping with the traditional Orestes pursued by Furies]; and so is the ruse of saving his life by pretending that he must be purified of his madness before he can be sacrificed. The episodes must also be of an appropriate length. In dramas, they are short; in the epic, it is they that serve to extend the poem. The main plan of the *Odyssey*, for example, is not long:

The plan of  
the Odyssey

A certain man has been absent from home for many years; he is dogged by Poseidon; and he is left companionless. Meanwhile, affairs at home are in evil case: his substance is being wasted by suitors to his wife, who have also formed a conspiracy to kill his son. Tempest-tossed, the man himself at length arrives, reveals who he is to certain persons, and attacks his enemies, the outcome being that he is preserved, and they perish.

This is the essential argument of the *Odyssey*; all the rest is in the nature of episode.

CHAPTER 18

To every tragedy there pertain (1) a Complication and (2) an Unraveling, or *Dénouement*. The incidents lying outside of the drama proper, and often certain of the in-

cidents within it, form the Complication; the rest of the play constitutes the *Dénouement*. More specifically, by Complication is meant everything from the beginning of the story up to that critical point, the last in a series of incidents, out of which comes the change of fortune; by *Dénouement*, everything from the beginning of the change of fortune to the end of the play. In the *Lynceus* of Theodectes, for example, the Complication embraces the incidents anterior to the drama proper, the seizure of the child Abas, and then the seizure of the parents; and the *Dénouement* extends from the indictment for murder to the end. [In *Iphigenia among the Taurians* the critical point, after which the *Dénouement* begins, is found in the recognition of Orestes by his sister. This point in a play, unfortunately, is sometimes called the 'climax.' A much better term is *crisis*. The crisis in *Oedipus the King* occurs in the meeting between Oedipus, the Herdsman, and the Messenger, at the end of which the hero is plunged into misery; the words of the Herdsman to Oedipus in line 1181, 'Know that thou wast born to misery,' mark the transition precisely. What Aristotle says of Complication and *Dénouement* can seldom be so exactly applied to the modern drama. Yet in Shakespeare and others it is instructive to look for the point from which the fortunes of the hero decline or rise—for the transition, that is, between what one calls the 'Rising' and the 'Falling' Action; as in *Othello*, Act 2, Scene 1, or Act 3, Scene 3.]

Complication  
and *Dénouement*

Four different sources of tragic effect have been discussed; namely: Reversal and Discovery (see pp. 34-37), taken together; the Tragic Incident (i.e., Suffering—see

Four Species  
of Tragedy,  
according to  
the Source of  
the Tragic  
Effect

Tragedy of  
Plot

Of Suffering

Of Character

Of Spectacle

pp. 37, 44–46); Moral Bent, or Character, in the agents (see pp. 39–41, 47–51); and Spectacular Means (see p. 43). Corresponding to the relative prominence of one or another of these factors in a play, there are four Species of Tragedy: (1) The Involved, where the whole play is a Reversal and Recognition [this is substantially true of Sophocles' *Electra*]. (2) The Tragedy of Suffering; for example, the plays having Ajax or Ixion as hero. (3) The Tragedy in which the nature of the agents is paramount; as Sophocles' *Women of Phthia*, and the *Peleus* of (?) the same author. (4) Then there is a fourth kind in which the Spectacular element is very important; as Aeschylus' *Daughters of Phorcys* and the *Prometheus* [another satyric drama, probably by Aeschylus—not the *Prometheus Bound*], and all plays having their scene laid in Hades. [Where the course of the drama is 'uninvolved,' not to say 'episodic,' any tragic effect a play may have is likely to arise from some element other than plot—for instance, from the 'spectacle.' The principle of division being positive, according to the actual source of the effect, we must not look for a species of tragedy called 'uninvolved'; yet see p. 77.] In the light of all this, one concludes that the poet must do his best to combine every element of interest in a tragedy, or, failing that, the most effective elements, and as many as possible. [Spectacle, of course, is the least important.] The effort is especially desirable at present, because of the unfairness of contemporary criticism. Just because among his predecessors there have been authors who were successful, each of them, in the use of some one source of interest, it is expected that the individual poet of to-day will surpass them all in their several lines of

Unfair de-  
mands of  
contemporary  
critics



excellence. But in comparing one tragedy with another, that is, in pointing out similarities and differences in the handling of material, the fairest way is to take the plots as a basis of criticism. And this, of course, amounts to comparing *Complication* with *Complication*, and *Dénouement* with *Dénouement*. Many dramatists succeed in the *Complication*, and then fail in the *Unraveling*. [Shakespeare is not always careful in working out the latter part of his dramas, especially his comedies—for example, in *As You Like It*.] But the poet must show his mastery of construction in both.

The fair basis of comparison is mastery of plot

The poet must excel in the Unraveling as well as in the Complication

The poet must likewise remember what has been said more than once, and not employ an entire epical scheme, that is, a multiple story, for the subject of a tragedy. One should not, for example, try to dramatize the whole story of the *Iliad*. In the Epic, owing to its scale, every part assumes its proper magnitude; but when the entire thing is reduced to the scale of a drama, the result is far below one's expectations. This is obvious in the ill success of those dramatists who have taken everything in the downfall of Ilium as the subject of one tragedy, and not, like Euripides, a single phase to a play, or the entire legend of Niobe, instead of a portion, like Aeschylus; for they have all either utterly failed, or at best made a poor showing on the stage. Even Agathon failed simply on this account. [An objection may be lodged against *Antony and Cleopatra* on the ground that Shakespeare has here compressed materials sufficient for an epic poem into a tragedy. Of course the scale of plays like this and *King Lear* is larger than that of Attic tragedy.]

The tragic poet must avoid a multiple story

Contemporary poets, however, show marvelous skill in

Further criticism of the later Greek Tragedy

constructing Reversals, and also uninvolved situations, with a view to producing the effects they desire, their aim being to arouse the tragic emotions and a general human sympathy. This sympathy is aroused when a hero combining intelligence with villainy, like Sisyphus, is outwitted, or when one is brought low who is brave and unjust. [Such cases, reminding us of Shakespeare's *Richard the Third*, are not typical, however—that is, in the Aristotelian sense, not 'probable.'] The outcome is probable only in Agathon's sense: it is likely, he says, that many unlikely things will occur.

The poet must treat the Chorus as one of the actors

The Chorus should be regarded as one of the actors; it should be an integral part of the whole, and take its share in the action. The model is the practice of Sophocles, and not Euripides. In subsequent poets the choral songs in a tragedy have no more connection with the plot than with that of any other play. Accordingly, at the present day, the Chorus sing mere interludes, a practice that goes back to Agathon. And yet, what real difference is there between introducing a song that is foreign to the action and attempting to fit a speech, or a whole episode, from one drama into another?

#### CHAPTER 19

On *Dianoia*, consult Aristotle's work on Rhetoric

The other formative elements of Tragedy (pp. 21–23) have now been discussed [especially Plot and Ethos], and it remains to speak of Diction and Intellect. As for the Intellectual element, we may assume what is said of it in the treatise on Rhetoric, to which inquiry the topic more properly belongs. [In that treatise, Aristotle says: 'Rhetoric may be defined as a faculty of discovering all the possible means of persuasion in any subject.'] The Intellectual element includes everything that is to be effected

by the language of the agents—in their efforts to prove and to refute; to arouse one another's emotions, such as pity, or fear, or anger, or the like; and to exaggerate or to discount the importance of things. [One may illustrate thus: Shakespeare makes Claudius attempt to prove to Hamlet that his grief for his father is obstinate; he makes Iago work upon the jealousy of Othello; Sophocles makes Jocasta minimize the importance of calling the Herdsman. Beneath what Claudius, Iago, and Jocasta say lies the Intellectual element. The poet must employ and represent it in the right way.] It is evident, too, that the same underlying forms of thought must be in operation whenever the poet makes the agents try by their *acts* to arouse pity or alarm in one another, or to give these acts an air of importance or naturalness. [If Shakespeare makes Hamlet wish his actions to seem strange, then beneath what Hamlet does, as well as beneath what he says, lies the Intellectual element.] The only difference is that the act must produce its effect on the other personages without verbal explanation; whereas if a speech be employed, the author must see to it that the effect is produced by the agent's speaking, and that it comes from the particular language the agent uses; for what point would there be in having A make a speech if B already saw things in the desired light, quite apart from anything that might be said?

The poet's  
use of  
Dianoia in  
what the  
agent says  
or does

Among the subjects of inquiry bearing on Diction, one is the Modes of Spoken Utterance, including such matters as the difference between a command and a prayer, a simple statement and a threat, a question and an answer, and so forth. A knowledge of such distinctions, how-

Diction

Remote con-  
siderations

ever, falls within the province of the interpreter, not of the poet, and is the concern of the general theorist on some art like Elocution. Whether the poet knows these things, or is ignorant of them, they do not directly touch his art, nor do they offer any ground for objections that are worth considering. For example, why should any one find fault with the opening of the *Iliad*: 'Sing, Goddess, of the wrath,' etc.?—to which Protagoras objected on the ground that, whereas Homer thinks he is uttering a prayer, actually he is giving a command; since to bid one do or not do a thing, says Protagoras, is an order. We may pass over this inquiry, therefore, as pertaining to another art, and not to the art of Poetry.

## CHAPTER 20

Diction  
proper, as  
related to  
the Art of  
Poetry

The Parts of  
Diction

The Diction proper, taken as a whole, is made up of the following parts. [The list begins with the smallest elements and proceeds synthetically to the largest composite factors of discourse—from the indivisible sound and the syllable, to the entire poem considered as a unified utterance.] (1) The Ultimate Element (or Letter); (2) the Primary Combination of ultimate elements (not quite a 'Syllable'); (3) the Connective Particle; (4) the Separative Particle; (5) the Noun; (6) the Verb; (7) the Inflection; (8) the Speech [or unified Utterance, from a phrase to a poem].

1. The Ultimate Element, or Letter

Vowels,  
Semivowels,  
and Mutes

The Ultimate Element (or Letter) is an indivisible sound—not every such sound, but a sound of such a nature that it may unite with others of its kind to form an intelligible word. The lower animals also utter indivisible sounds, but none that are elementary in the present sense. These elementary sounds are divided into (a) Vowels, (b) Semivowels, and (c) Mutes. (a) A Vowel is an ele-

ment having an audible sound without the addition of another element. (b) A Semivowel is an element—as S or R—having an audible sound when another element is added to it. (c) A Mute is an element—as G or D—having no sound in and for itself, but becoming audible by an addition—of elements, that is, that have some sound of their own. The elementary sounds differ in several ways:

(a) they are produced by different positions of the mouth, or in different parts of it; (b) they are aspirated, or not aspirated, or intermediate; (c) they are long, or short, or intermediate; and, furthermore, (d) they have an acute, or grave, or intermediate stress. A consideration of the details belongs to the theorists on Metre.

Other differences

A Syllable is a non-significant sound composed of a Mute and a letter having a sound (a Vowel or Semivowel); for the combination GR, without the A, is just as truly a syllable as when A is added, in GRA. But a consideration of the various forms of the Syllable likewise belongs to the theory of Metre.

2. The Primary Combination

[Aristotle now passes from the indivisible elements of spoken sounds, and the primary combinations of these in syllables, to higher combinations, the elements of the phrase or sentence. These are either particles which have no meaning when taken by themselves, or elements, such as nouns and verbs, which have a significance of their own.]

A Connective Particle is (a) a non-significant sound—such as *men*, *dē*, *toi*, *dě*—which neither hinders nor causes the formation of one significant sound (expression) out of two or more others [e.g., a single clause, or the like, out of a noun and a verb], and which, if the ex-

3. The Connective Particle

pression stand by itself, must not be inserted as the first word. [When we form the expression *Gnothi seauton*—‘Know thyself’—the process is neither helped nor hindered by the insertion of *dě*; but if the particle be inserted, it must not stand first.] Or it is a nonsignificant sound—like *amphi*, *peri*, etc.—with (b) the function of combining two or more significant sounds into one expression [as a preposition serves to unite its noun with a verb].

4. The Separative Particle

A Separative Particle (i.e., sentence-connective and disjunctive particle) is a non-significant sound which marks the beginning, end, or division of an expression, and whose natural place is at either end of the expression or in the middle. [We turn now to those elements which have a significance in themselves.]

5. The Noun or Name-word

A Noun [or name-word, including nouns, adjectives, etc.] is a composite significant sound, with no reference to time, no part of which is significant by itself; for even when a noun is made up of two others, we do not attach separate meanings to the parts. For example, when we use the name ‘Theodore’ (‘god-given’), we do not associate the notion of ‘gift’ with the *doron*.

6. The Verb

A Verb is a composite significant sound, no part of which is significant by itself any more than the parts of a Noun, but which involves the notion of time. Whereas a name (‘Noun’) like ‘man’ or ‘white’ does not indicate the notion of *when*, a Verb like ‘walks’ or ‘has walked’ indicates not only the idea of walking, but, in addition, that of time present or past.

7. The Inflection

An Inflection of a Noun or Verb is that element by which the word means ‘of’ or ‘to’ a thing, and the like; or by which it stands for one or many—as ‘man’ or ‘men’; or



by which it indicates the mode of utterance, as in a question or a command. Thus 'Did walk?' or 'Walk!' is an inflection, of the last sort, of the Verb 'to walk.'

A Speech (or unified Utterance) is a composite significant sound, of which at least some of the parts (as nouns or verbs) are significant in themselves. Such a composite utterance is not always made up of Nouns (or names) and Verbs; it may, for example, be without a Verb, as in the definition of Man: 'A biped land animal.' However, there will always be a part that stands for some person or thing, as 'Cleon,' in the sentence, 'Cleon is walking.' A Speech (sentence or whole utterance) may be a unit in either of two ways: (a) it may signify one thing; or (b) the unity may be brought about through the linking together of more than one utterance. Thus the *Iliad* is one utterance through the binding together of a number; and the definition of Man is a unit because it signifies one thing.

8. The  
Speech or  
synthetic  
Utterance

Two ways of  
regarding  
Unity

Nouns (or name-words) are of two kinds, (a) Simple and (b) Compound. By Simple are meant those that are formed of non-significant elements, as the word *ge* ('earth'). A Compound noun may be made up of a significant and a non-significant part—though the distinction is lost when the parts are united; or it may be made up of two parts, both of which, taken by themselves, are significant. A Compound noun may also be triple or quadruple, or multiple, in form, like most of the amplified (? bombastic) names (? in comedy), such as 'Hermocaiico-xanthus.' [Compare 'Poly-machaero-plagides,' in Plautus' adaptation from the New Comedy of Greece.]

CHAPTER 21

Nouns or  
Names.  
Their for-  
mation:  
Simple;  
Compound

Whatever the formation, a Noun (or name) is either

(1) the Current Term for a thing; or (2) a Strange (or rare) Word; or (3) a Metaphor; or (4) an Ornamental Word; or (5) a Newly-coined Word; or a word that is (6) Lengthened, or (7) Curtailed, or (8) Altered.

1. Current  
Terms

By a Current Term is meant the word that is used for a thing by the people we know; by a Strange (or rare) Word, one that is used in another region. It is obvious that the same word may be both Strange and Current, though not with reference to the same region. The word *sigynon* ('lance'), for example, is current in Cyprus, but rare at Athens.

2. Strange  
Words

3. Metaphor:  
Four Kinds

Metaphor consists in the application to one thing of the name that belongs to another: (a) the name of the genus may be applied to a subordinate species; (b) the name of the species may be applied to the inclusive genus; (c) under the same genus, the name of one species may be applied to another; or (d) there may be a transference of names on grounds of analogy (or proportion).

(a) The transference of a name from the genus to a species is illustrated in 'Here *stands* my ship'; for *to be at anchor* is one species of the genus *standing*.

(b) That from species to genus, in 'Of a truth, *ten thousand* noble deeds hath Odysseus wrought'; where *ten thousand* is a particular large number, used instead of *a large number* in general.

(c) That from species to species, in 'With a knife of bronze *drawing* away the life-blood,' and in 'Cutting with the unwearing bronze'; where the poet (? Empedocles) uses *drawing* for *cutting*, and *cutting* for *drawing*, when both terms are species of the genus *removing*. [The notion

may be this: a surgeon *cuts* with a knife, and *draws blood* with a cupping-instrument, blood being *removed* in either case. The medical poet is able to substitute either of the two specific words for the other.]

(d) By Metaphor formed on the basis of analogy (or proportion) is meant the case when a second term, B, is to a first, A, as a fourth, D, is to a third, C; whereupon the fourth term, D, may be substituted for the second, B, or the second, B, for the fourth, D. Sometimes, too, the poet will qualify the metaphorical word by adding to it the term (+A or +C) to which the non-figurative term is relative. To illustrate: the drinking-bowl (B) is to Dionysus (A) as the shield (D) is to Ares (C). Accordingly, the bowl (B) may be called *the shield* (D) of Dionysus, and the shield (D) *the bowl* (B) of Ares. Or another illustration: old age (B) is to life (A) as evening (D) is to the day (C). Hence one will speak of *the evening* (D) as the *old age* (B) of the day—or as Empedocles does; and of *old age* (B) as *the evening* (D) of life—or as ‘the sunset of life.’ In certain cases, the language may contain no actual word corresponding to one of the terms in the proportion, but the figure nevertheless will be employed. For example, when a fruit casts forth its seed the action is called ‘sowing,’ but the action of the sun in casting forth its flame has no special name. Yet this nameless action (B) is to the sun (A) as *sowing* (D) is to the fruit (C); and hence we have the expression of the poet, ‘*sowing* a god-created flame.’ There is still another way in which this kind of metaphor may be used. We may substitute one term, B, for another, D, and then subtract some charac-

Proportional  
Metaphor

teristic attribute of B. For example, one might call *the shield* (D), not *the bowl* (B) of Ares, but 'the *wineless bowl*.'

[4. Ornamental Words]

[The Ornamental Word is not discussed. It must mean the superior or more beautiful word, as when there is a choice among synonyms; see above, p. xxviii.]

5. Newly-coined Words

A Newly-coined Word is one that is wholly unknown to any region, and is applied to something by an individual poet; for there seem to be certain words of this origin—as *ernyges* for 'horns,' and *areter* for 'priest.' [Thus Spenser is said to have coined the word *blatant*.]

6. Lengthened Words

A Lengthened Word is one in which a customary short vowel is made long, or in which an extra syllable is inserted. Thus *polēōs* is lengthened from *polēōs* (the short *e* becoming long); and *Pēlēiadeō* from *Pēleidou* (by change of vowel-length and insertion of syllables).

7. Curtailed Words

A Curtailed Word is one from which some part has been removed; for example: *kri* (for *krithe*), *do* (for *doma*), and *ops*, in '*Mia ginetai amphoteron ops*' (for *opsis*).

8. Altered Words

An Altered Word is one in which the poet, having left some part unchanged, remodels the rest; for example, *dexiteron* is altered from *dexion* in '*dexiteron cata mazon*.'

Gender of Nouns

The Nouns (or name-words), whether current, metaphorical, curtailed, or the like, are either Masculine, Feminine, or Neuter. All nouns ending in N, R, or S, or in combinations of S, that is, Psi (PS) or Xi (KS), are masculine. All ending in Eta (E) or Omega (O), which are always long, or in A, among the vowels that sometimes are long, are feminine. Accordingly, among the letters of the alphabet there are just as many masculine as feminine terminations (that is, three of each); for Psi and Xi count

as S. No noun ends in a mute or in either of the short vowels Epsilon (Ė) and Omicron (Ŏ). Only three nouns end in I, namely, *meli*, *kommi*, and *peperi*. Five end in Y. The neuters end in the vowels that admit of lengthening, or in N, R, or S.

In respect to Diction, the ideal for the poet is to be clear without being mean. The clearest diction is that which is wholly made up of current terms (the ordinary words for things). But a style so composed is mean; witness the poetry of Cleophon or Sthenelus. [Some of the poetry of Crabbe would furnish another illustration. And compare Kipling in 'The female of the species,' etc.] But the language attains majesty and distinction when the poet makes use of terms that are less familiar: rare words, metaphors, lengthened forms—everything that deviates from the ordinary usage. Yet if one composes in a diction of such terms alone, the result will be either a riddle or an unnatural jargon—a riddle if the language be nothing but metaphors, and a jargon if it be nothing but words that are strange (dialect words and the like). Indeed, the very essence of a riddle consists in describing an actual occurrence by an impossible combination of words. Now this cannot be done through any arrangement of words in their primary meanings, but it can through their metaphorical substitutes. For example: 'A man I saw gluing bronze on a man with fire' [an enigmatical description of blood-letting with a vacuum in a cup of bronze], and the like. A similar combination of strange words only would be a jargon.

The poet, then, should employ a certain admixture of these expressions that deviate from the ordinary; for dis-

CHAPTER 22

Choice of  
Words.  
The Ideal is  
Clearness and  
Distinction

Not a riddle  
or a jargon

How to secure Clear-  
ness; how  
Distinction

Modifications  
of Usage de-  
fended from  
ridicule

tion and elevation of style will result from the use of such means as the strange word, the metaphor, the ornamental word, and the rest; and clearness will arise from such part of the language as is in common use. Very important in helping to make the style clear without loss of distinction are the lengthened, curtailed, and altered forms of words. Their deviation from the customary forms will lend the quality of distinction; and the element they have in common with the ordinary usage will give clearness. Those critics are in the wrong, therefore, who censure such a modification of usage, and ridicule the poet for resorting to it—as when the elder Euclid said it was easy enough to make poetry if they would let you lengthen out words as you pleased. So he caricatured the practice in the sentences:

I saw Epichares a-walking Marathon-wards;

and

*Ouk an g' eramenos ton ekeinou elleboron;*

—which he read as verses. [The text of the second line is corrupt.] An obtrusive employment of the device of lengthening words becomes, of course, ridiculous; but the same thing is true of any similar stylistic procedure. The principle of moderation should govern the use of every element of diction; for with metaphors also, and strange words, and the rest, a like effect will ensue if they are used without propriety, and with the aim of causing laughter.

Use and  
Abuse are  
different  
things

A test of the  
need of devi-  
ations from  
the ordinary

The proper use of lengthened forms is a different thing; as may be seen in Epic Poetry, if we take a verse and substitute therein the common forms of the words. And a similar test should be made with the strange word, and



with metaphors and the rest. One has only to replace them by the terms of ordinary usage, and the truth of our remarks will be obvious. For example, the same iambic line occurs in Aeschylus and Euripides, though in Aeschylus it is commonplace; but Euripides, by the substitution of just one word—a strange word in place of the ordinary—has rendered the line beautiful. Aeschylus in his *Philoctetes* makes the hero say:

The cancer that *is eating* the flesh of my foot;

Euripides replaces 'is eating' by 'feasts on.' Or take the line uttered by the Cyclops in the *Odyssey*:

Lo, now, a dwarf, a man of no worth, and a weakling;  
and fancy some one reciting it in the terms of ordinary usage:

See, now, a small man, feeble, and unprepossessing.

Or take the line:

And placed for him (Odysseus) an unseemly settle and a meagre table;

and suppose it to be read thus:

And brought him a sorry chair and a small table.

Or substitute for 'the sea-beach bellows,' in the *Iliad*, 'the beach is roaring.' Again, Aripheades used to ridicule the tragedians for locutions which no one would employ in ordinary conversation; for example, 'from the house away'—instead of 'away from the house'; 'of thee,' instead of 'yours'; *ego de nin*, instead of *ego d' auten*; 'Achilles about,' instead of 'about Achilles'; and so on. [Compare Wordsworth: 'That glides the dark hills under.'] It is just be-

As in the  
Epic, so in  
Tragedy,  
deviations  
are defensible

cause these expressions are not ordinary that they give distinction to the language; and that is the point Ariphrades failed to catch.

It is, indeed, important to make the right use of each of the elements mentioned—lengthened, curtailed, and altered words—as well as of compounds and strange words. But most important by far is it to have a command of metaphor. This is the one thing the poet cannot learn from others. It is the mark of genius; for to coin good metaphors involves an insight into the resemblances between objects that are superficially unlike.

Of the several kinds we have noted, compound words are best adapted to the dithyramb, strange words to heroic metre [that is, to epic poetry], and metaphors to iambic metre [that is, to the tragic dialogue]. In Heroic poetry, it is true, all the special forms may be used. But iambic verse, as far as may be, represents the spoken language, and hence employs only the kinds of words one would use in oratory; that is, the current term, the metaphor, and the ornamental (more beautiful) word. [See Introduction, above, p. xxviii.]

Herewith we close the discussion of Tragedy, or the art of imitation in the form of action.

A Command  
of Metaphor  
is the mark  
of genius

Varieties of  
Diction for  
different  
Metres

### III

#### EPIC POETRY. THE PRINCIPLES OF ITS CONSTRUCTION

And now for the form of poetry which is purely narrative, or the art which imitates in metrical language as its sole medium. CHAPTER 23

In the Epic Poem, as in Tragedy, the story should be constructed on dramatic principles: everything should turn about a single action, one that is a whole, and is organically perfect—having a beginning, and a middle, and an end. In this way, just as a living animal, individual and perfect, has its own beauty, so the poem will arouse in us its own characteristic form of pleasure. So much is obvious from what has gone before. Putting the thing negatively, we may say that the plot of an Epic Poem must be unlike what we commonly find in histories, which of necessity represent, not a single action, but some one period, with all that happened therein to one or more persons, however unrelated the several occurrences may have been. For example: the Battle of Salamis took place at the same time as the defeat of the Carthaginians in Sicily; but the two events did not converge to the same end. And similarly, one event may immediately follow another in point of time, and yet there may be no sequence

What the  
Epic has in  
common with  
Tragedy

It is not a  
Chronicle

leading to one issue. Nevertheless, one may venture to say, most of the epic poets commit this very fault of making their plots like chronicles.

In precisely this respect, therefore, Homer, as we already have said (p. 30), manifestly transcends the other epic poets. Far from taking all the legend of Ilium for his theme, he did not attempt to deal even with the War in its entirety, although this had a definite beginning and end. Very likely he thought that the story would be too long to be easily grasped as a whole—or, if it were not too long, that it would be too complicated from the variety of the incidents. As it is, he has selected a single phase of the war for his main action, and employs a number of the other incidents by way of episode; for example, he diversifies his narrative with the *Catalogue of the Ships*, and so forth. Of the other epic poets, some take for their subject all the deeds of one man; others all the events in one period; and others a single action, but one with a multiplicity of parts. This last is what was done by the author of the *Cypria*, and by the author of the *Little Iliad*. The consequence is that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* each furnish materials for but a single tragedy, or at most for two; while the *Cypria* supplies subjects for a number; and the *Little Iliad* for eight or more: an *Award of the Arms*, a *Philoctetes*, a *Neoptolemus*, a *Eurypylus*, a *Mendicant Odysseus*, a *Spartan Women*, a *Sack of Ilium*, a *Sailing of the Fleet*—one might add a *Sinon* and a *Trojan Women*.

Furthermore, there must be the same varieties of Epic Poetry as of Tragedy. That is, an Epic plot must be either (1) Uninvolved or (2) Involved, or the story must be one (3) of Character or (4) of Suffering. [The division cor-

Homer a  
model in his  
choice of  
subject

Mistakes in  
choice by  
other Epic  
Poets

#### CHAPTER 24

Four Species  
of Epic  
Poetry

responds in the last three points with the similar division under tragedy (pp. 59–60), but not in the first. The epic poem with an uninvolved plot may rank in Aristotle's mind with the kind of tragedy in which the effect is mainly dependent upon 'Spectacle,' the plot being, perhaps, episodic; otherwise there is a more troublesome discrepancy.] The Constituent Parts, also, of the Epic Poem must be the same as in Tragedy—save that the poet does not use the elements of Melody and Spectacle; for there necessarily are Reversals and Discoveries and Sufferings in this form of poetry as in that. And the Intellectual Processes and the Diction must be artistically-worked out. These elements were all first used by Homer, who laid the proper emphasis on them severally; for each of his poems is a model of construction—the *Iliad* of an uninvolved plot and a story of tragic suffering; the *Odyssey* of an involved plot (since there are Discoveries throughout) and a story of character. And in addition to these excellences, each of the poems surpasses all others in point of Diction and Thought. [The excellence in point of 'Thought' is shown, for example, in the structure of the speeches. So much, then, for similarities between the epic poem and tragedy.]

Constituents  
common to the  
**Epic Poem** and  
to Tragedy

But Epic Poetry differs from Tragedy (1) in the length of the composition, and (2) in the metre. As for the length, an adequate limit has already been suggested (pp. 28–29): it must be possible for us to embrace the beginning and end of the story in one view. Now this condition would be met if the poem were shorter than the old epic poems—if it were about as long as one of the groups of three tragedies presented for a single hearing.

The Epic Poem  
differs from  
Tragedy in  
1. Length

The advantage of Length

[Say, 3500–4000 lines in all; the Orestean Trilogy of Aeschylus runs to 3795.] But through its capacity for extension, Epic Poetry has a great and peculiar advantage; for in a tragedy it is not possible to represent a number of incidents in the action as carried on simultaneously—the poet is limited to the one thing done on the stage by the actors who are there. But in the Epic, because of the narrative form, he may represent a number of incidents as simultaneous occurrences; and these, if they are relevant to the action, materially add to the poem. The increase in bulk tends to the advantage of the Epic in grandeur, and in variety of interest for the hearer through diversity of incident in the episodes. Uniformity of incident quickly satiates the audience, and makes tragedies fail on the stage.

2. Metre:  
the Heroic

Its advantage

As for the metre, Epic Poetry has appropriated the heroic (hexameter verse) as a result of experience. And the fitness of this measure might be critically tested; for if any one were to produce a narrative poem in another metre, or in several others, the incongruity would be obvious. Of all metres, in fact, the heroic is the stateliest and most impressive. On this account, it most readily admits the use of strange words and metaphors (see p. 74); for in its tolerance of forms that are out of the ordinary, narrative poetry goes beyond the other kinds. The iambic and trochaic measures, on the other hand, are the concomitants of motion, the trochaic being appropriate to dancing, and the iambic expressive of life and action. [Accordingly, neither is suited to the stately epic.] Still more unfitting would it be to compose an epic in a hotch-potch of metres after the fashion of Chaeremon's rhapsody.



sody. Hence no one ever has written a long story in any other metre than the heroic. Rather, nature herself, as we have said (cf. p. 13), teaches us to select the proper kind of verse for such a story.

Homer, so worthy of praise in other respects, is especially admirable in that he alone among epic poets is not unaware of the part to be taken by the author himself in his work. The poet should, in fact, say as little as may be in his own person, since in his personal utterances he is not an imitative artist. Now the rest of the epic poets continually appear in their own works, and their snatches of artistic imitation are few and far between. But Homer, after a brief preliminary, straightway brings in a man, or a woman, or some other type—no one of them vague, but each sharply differentiated. [The preliminaries of Milton are longer and more personal.]

The Epic Poet is not to obtrude himself in his work

Some element of the marvelous unquestionably has a place in Tragedy; but the irrational (or illogical), which is the chief factor in the marvelous, and which must so far as possible be excluded from Tragedy, is more freely admitted in the Epic, since the persons of the story are not actually before our eyes. Take the account of the pursuit of Hector in the *Iliad*. On the stage, the scene would be ridiculous: Achilles running after Hector all alone, beneath the walls of Troy; the Grecian warriors halting instead of following, and Achilles shaking his head to warn them not to throw darts at their foe. In the narrative, however, since we do not combine the circumstances into one picture, the absurdity of the situation is not perceived.

Place of the Marvelous, and even the Irrational, in the Epic

That the marvelous is a source of pleasure may be seen by the way in which people add to a story; for they always

The Marvelous; why people tell lies

How to represent a lie artistically

embellish the facts with striking details, in the belief that it will gratify the listeners. Yet it is Homer above all who has shown the rest of us how a lie ought to be told. The essence of the method is the use of a fallacy in reasoning, as follows. Suppose that whenever A exists or comes to pass, B must exist or occur; men think, if the consequent B exists, the antecedent A must also—but the inference is illegitimate. For the poet, accordingly, the right method is this: if the antecedent A is untrue, and if there is something else, B, which would necessarily exist or occur if A were true, one must add on the B; for, knowing the added detail to be true, we ourselves mentally proceed to the fallacious inference that the antecedent A is likewise true. We may take an instance from the *Bath Scene* in the *Odyssey*. [Here, Odysseus, disguised in rags, wishes to convince Penelope that he, the Beggar, has seen the real Odysseus alive = A, a falsehood. Accordingly, he adds an accurate description of the hero's clothing, etc., = B. Penelope knows B to be true, since the garments came from her. If A were true, that is, if the Beggar had seen Odysseus, the natural consequence, B, would be a true description of the clothing. From the truth of B, Penelope mistakenly infers the occurrence of A, and believes the Beggar. The illusion, which is partly shared by any one who hears the story, witnesses to the artistic method of the poet.]

The poet should prefer a probable impossibility to an incredible possibility

A sequence of events which, though actually impossible, looks reasonable should be preferred by the poet to what, though really possible, seems incredible. The story [whether of an epic or a tragedy] should not be made up of incidents which are severally improbable;

one should rather aim to include no irrational element whatsoever. At any rate, if an irrational element is unavoidable, it should lie outside of the story proper—as the hero's ignorance in *Oedipus the King* of the way in which Laius met his death. It should not lie within the story—like the anachronism in Sophocles' *Electra*, where a legendary hero is described as being killed at the modern Pythian games; or like the silence of (?) Telephus in *The Mysians* of (?) Aeschylus, where the man comes all the way from Tegea to Mysia without speaking. Accordingly, it is ridiculous for a poet to say that his story would be ruined if such incidents were left out; he has no business to construct such a plot to begin with. But if he does set out to represent an irrational incident, and if he obviously could have treated it in a way less offensive to our notions of probability, his fault is worse than ridiculous, lying not in his choice of an object to imitate, but in his art as an imitator. In the hands of an inferior poet, how manifest and intolerable would the improbabilities become which we find even in the *Odyssey*, at the point where Odysseus is set ashore. [Earnestly desiring to see his native land, Odysseus nevertheless sleeps from the time he leaves the land of the Phaeacians until after they have disembarked him on his own island, and gone away; although 'the vessel in full course ran ashore, half her keel's length high.'] As it is, Homer conceals the absurdity and renders the incident charming, by means of his other excellences [in particular by the elaborate description of the nocturnal voyage, and of the haven and cave at Ithaca].

The Irra-  
tional

If chosen at  
all, it must  
be treated  
with skill

As in Homer

The place of  
Ornate  
Diction

Elaborate Diction, however, is to be used only when

the action pauses, and no purposes and arguments of the agents are to be displayed. Conversely, where the purposes and reasonings of the agents need to be revealed, a too ornate Diction will obscure them.

## IV

### PROBLEMS IN CRITICISM. THE PRINCIPLES OF THEIR SOLUTION

[Various allusions have been made to the current and anterior criticism, more or less unsound, of poets and poetry—for example, to the injustice of comparing tragedies upon some basis other than the plot, and to the ridiculing of the epic poets by the elder Euclid, and of tragic diction by Ariphrades. We now come to a discussion of the way in which critical objections ought really to be formulated, and of the laws by which, in special cases, the poet is to be adjudged right or wrong. Aristotle is constructive and conservative in spirit, and the discussion amounts to a defence of poetry, above all, that of Homer, against destructive criticism.]

As to Problems in criticism, and the respective Solutions of them: they rest upon certain underlying principles, and the number and nature of these will be clear if we take account of the following considerations.

(1) The poet, as we have seen, is an imitator, just like a painter or any other maker of likenesses [e.g., a sculptor]; of necessity, therefore, he must, in all instances, represent one of three objects (cf. pp. 2, 6): (a) Things as they once were, or are now [historical or scientific truth];

CHAPTER 25

1. Principle  
of the Object  
of the Imita-  
tion

2. Principle  
of the Me-  
dium

3. Principle  
of Artistic  
Correctness.  
Poetry has a  
standard of  
its own

Two kinds of  
errors in  
Poetry

(b) Things as they are said or thought to be [tradition and common belief]; (c) Things as they ought to be [the typical—*aesthetic truth*]. (2) The poet's medium of expression is the Diction, unadorned, or with an admixture of strange words and metaphors—indeed, there are various modifications of ordinary usage that we concede to the poets. (3) Furthermore, the standard of correctness is not the same in Poetry as in Politics; it is different in Poetry from that in any other art. [A citizen who fulfilled his duty to the State and in private life would satisfy the standard of correctness in Politics and Ethics; but to satisfy the standard of correctness in tragedy, for example, the agents must come short of perfect justice and goodness. Cf. p. 41.] Within the limits of poetry there can be two kinds of errors, the one (a) directly involving the art, the other (b) adventitious. If the poet has chosen something for the object of his imitation, and through want of capacity fails properly to represent what he has in mind, this is (a) a fault in his art itself. But let us suppose that he has made an incorrect choice in the object he wishes to represent; let us suppose, for example, that he wishes to represent a moving horse with both right legs thrown forward; or suppose that he makes a mistake in any other special branch of knowledge—medicine or the like; or let the impossible objects which he represents be what they may. If he succeeds in duly imitating the object which he has in mind, his mistake is not (a) one that concerns the Poetic Art itself. It is (b) adventitious. These, then, are the considerations from which one must proceed in answering the strictures of the critics.

Let us first consider the strictures relating to the Poetic



Art itself. If impossibilities have been represented, the poet is guilty of a fault. Yet such impossibilities may still be justified, if their representation serves the purpose of the art itself—for we must remember what has been said of the end of poetry; that is, they are justified if they give the passage they are in, or some other passage, a more astounding effect. The pursuit of Hector (see p. 79) is a case in point, being justified by the poetic effect. But if the ends of poetry could have been as well or better subserved by scientific accuracy, the error is not justified; for the poet ought if possible to make no mistakes whatever.

Impossibilities may be justified in part

Yet the Poet ought really to make no mistakes

Again, when an error is found, one must always ask: Is the mistake adventitious, arising from ignorance in some special field of knowledge, or does it concern the art of imitation as such? If a painter thinks a female deer has horns, for example, that is less of an error than to fail in representing his actual conception.

Is the fault Intrinsic or Adventitious

Furthermore, it may be objected that the representation of the poet is not true [i.e., to things as they are or have been]. The answer to this may be that they are represented as they ought to be [that they are typical]; just as Sophocles affirmed that he himself drew men as they ought to be, and Euripides men as they are. But if the representation be true neither to fact nor to the ideal, the answer may be that it accords with current legends and popular belief: 'People say so.' The unedifying poetical tales about the gods, for instance, are, very possibly, neither true nor the preferable thing to relate; in fact, they may be as false and immoral as Xenophanes declares. But they certainly are in keeping with popular belief. Of still other things which are objected to in poetry, one may pos-

Poetic Truth

sibly say, not that they are better than the fact here and now, but that the fact was so at the time [historical truth]. Such is the case with the description of the arms of Diomed and his companions in the *Iliad*: 'Their spears were driven into the ground, erect upon the spikes of the butts' [the practice described in Homer is not better than the method familiar to his critics, but it accords with historical truth]; for that was the custom then, as it is in Illyria even now.

As for the question whether something said or done by some one in a poem is proper or not: to answer this we must not merely consider the intrinsic quality of the act or utterance, to see whether it is noble or base in itself; we must also consider (a) the person who does or says the thing, (b) the person to whom it is done or said, or (c) when, or (d) in whose interest, or (e) with what motive, it is done or said. Thus we must examine any questionable word or act, to see whether the motive of the agent is to secure some greater good or to avert a greater evil. [The speeches of Satan in *Paradise Lost* are not morally good in themselves. They have 'semblance of worth, not substance.' But the first, for example, is poetically good. We must bear in mind that it is addressed by (a) the Father of Lies to (b) another demon, (c) nine days after their plunge into Hell, (d) in the interest of the speaker, (e) with the motive of bettering his condition.]

The justice or injustice of other criticisms must be decided by the principles of poetic diction. For example, objection may be raised to a passage because the critic fails to see that the poet is using (a) a strange word. At the beginning of the *Iliad*, the angry god is represented as

Artistic  
Propriety

a. An appeal  
to the nature  
of the  
Medium

first assailing the *oureas*. Now by *oureas* Homer may possibly mean not *mules*, but *sentinels*. [The critics found it difficult to believe that Apollo's arrows would strike the camp-animals before the men.] And when the poet says of Dolon, 'He was ill-favored of figure,' the meaning may be, not that his body was deformed, but that his face was ugly; for *well-figured* is the Cretan expression for *well-featured*. [The question apparently was raised: If Dolon was deformed, how could he also be 'swift of foot'?] So, too, 'Mix the drink *livelier*' may mean, not 'Mix it *stronger*,' as though for sots, but 'Mix it quicker.'

Other difficulties may be explained under this head, if we regard the language as (b) metaphorical. Homer says: 'Now *all* gods and men were sleeping through the night'; and at the same time he tells us: 'And whenever he looked at the Trojan plain, he marveled at the sound of flutes and pipes.' [I.e., some men were awake.] The difficulty may be resolved if we regard *all* as used metaphorically for *many*, since *all* is a species of the genus *many*. So also we may explain, 'And she *alone* hath no part in the baths of Ocean'; for the other northern constellations that do not set are not familiar like the Great Bear, and the one which is very familiar may be figuratively called the only one.

b. Metaphors

Again, a passage that is censured may be defended after study (c) of the pronunciation. Thus *didomen de hoi* ('We grant him his prayer') has been criticized as making Zeus a liar; and *to men hou cataputhetai ombro* ('the wood of which'—oak and pine—'is rotted with rain'), as not being scientifically true. In such cases the solution of the difficulty may be like that of Hippias the Thasian, who

c. Testing  
the Pronun-  
ciation

changed the accent to *didómen*, and the breathing to *ou*: 'Grant him his prayer'—where the lying rests with the deceptive dream, rather than with Zeus; and 'is *not* rotted with rain'—which is true of oak and pine.

d. Testing  
the Punctu-  
ation

Other difficulties one may solve by considering (d) the punctuation, as in the sentence of Empedocles: 'Suddenly things became mortal that before had learnt to be immortal and things unmixed before mixed.' [If the passage is censured when a comma follows 'unmixed,' perhaps the comma ought to precede 'mixed.']

e. Possible  
Ambiguities  
in Grammar

Or we may have to consider (e) the grammatical ambiguity of an expression, as in the passage: 'Of the night *pleon* two watches are spent'; if *pleon* means 'more than' two watches, the phrase contradicts 'but a third part still remains.' But the solution may be that the expression means 'full two watches.'

f. An appeal  
to Special  
Usage

Or we may have to appeal (f) to the custom of language. Just as we now call wine and water 'wine,' so Homer in speaking of 'the greave of new-wrought *tin*,' from which the spear rebounded, may mean a metallic alloy of tin. And as we call workers in iron *chalkeas* ('braziers'), so Homer may call Ganymede the 'wine-pourer to Zeus,' although the gods drink, not wine, but nectar. This difficulty, however, may be resolved as an instance of (b) metaphor.

g. Possible  
Homonyms

Finally, a passage in dispute may be defended through an appeal to (g) the several possibilities of meaning in a single word—as distinguished from (e) ambiguities in grammar. When a word seems to involve some inconsistency, one should consider the different senses it may

bear in its context. For example: 'There' (at or in the third and golden layer of the shield) '*scheto*' ('stuck' or 'stayed') 'the spear of bronze.' One should ask in how many ways we may take *scheto*. [Homer says that the spear pierced two layers, and implies that the next remained unpierced; but if the spear *stuck* in the third layer, it must have pierced that also. The alleged inconsistency disappears if we consider that *scheto* may also mean *stayed*: 'There stayed the spear of bronze.']

In other words, the right procedure is just the opposite of the method condemned by Glaucon, who says of certain critics: 'They begin with some unwarranted assumption, and having pronounced judgment in a matter, they go on to argue from this; and if what the poet says does not agree with what they happen to think, they censure his supposed misstatement.' Such is the fashion in which the question about Icarius, in the *Odyssey*, has been handled. The critics begin by imagining that he was a Lacedaemonian, and accordingly they think it strange that his grandson, Telemachus, did not meet him on the journey to Lacedaemon. But perhaps the case may be as the Cephallenians say; for their story is that Odysseus took a wife from Cephallenia, and that her father's name was not Icarius, but Icadius. It is doubtless a mistake of the critics that has given rise to the problem.

Right and  
wrong Pro-  
cedure in  
Criticism

In general, questions as to the poet's use of impossibilities must be decided by an appeal either to (a) the end of Poetry, or to (b) ideal truth, or to (c) what is commonly believed. For the ends of Poetry, (a) a thing really impossible, yet on the face of it convincing, is pref-

The test for  
alleged im-  
possibilities



erable to one that, though possible, does not win belief. And if such men as Zeuxis painted be called too beautiful, the pictures may be defended as (b) true to the ideal; for the type necessarily excels the average and actual.

For alleged  
improbabil-  
ities

What the critics term improbable one must judge by an appeal to popular belief, and by an attempt to show that on occasion the thing may not be improbable; for [as Agathon suggested (see p. 62)] it is likely that something improbable will now and then occur.

For alleged  
contradic-  
tions in  
language

As for alleged contradictions in the poet's language, these we must scrutinize as one deals with sophistical refutations in an argument; that is, as is done in dialectics. Then we can see whether the poet in his several statements refers to the same thing, in the same relation, and in the same sense, and can judge whether or not he has contradicted what he himself says, or what a person of intelligence normally assumes as true.

Where the  
critic had  
best look for  
errors

The censure of the critic is just, however, when it is directed against improbability in the plot, and, similarly, against depravity in the agents; that is, when there is no inner necessity for a base agent, and when the irrational element serves no artistic purpose. Thus there is no adequate reason for Aegeus' appearing in Euripides' *Medea*, and none for the baseness of Menelaus in his *Orestes*.

Summary

We see, accordingly, that all the strictures of critics are reducible to five species. Objections are raised against poetry on the ground that something is either (1) impossible, (2) irrational (improbable), (3) morally hurtful, (4) contradictory, or (5) contrary to artistic correctness. The answers to these objections must be sought under one or another of the heads enumerated above (see

Five Sources  
of Objections



pp. 83-84). And these answers are twelve in number. [The twelve problems and answers apparently correspond to criticisms that touch the poetic art (1) directly, (2) indirectly; or that touch the poet as an imitator of things (3) as they were or are, (4) as they are said or thought to be, (5) as they ought to be; or that bear on (6) strange words, (7) metaphors, (8) pronunciation, (9) punctuation, (10) grammatical ambiguity, (11) custom of language, (12) different meanings of the same word.]

Three Main Considerations

Twelve special Problems and Solutions

#### CHAPTER 26

The question finally suggests itself: Which is the higher form of art, Epic Poetry or Tragedy? Those who favor the Epic Poem may argue thus: The less vulgar form is the higher; and that which addresses the better audience is always the less vulgar. [Compare Milton: 'Fit audience find though few.'] If this be so, it is obvious that a pantomimic art like Tragedy is exceedingly vulgar; for [so the argument runs] the performers suppose that unless they throw in something of their own, the audience will not understand what is meant, and hence they indulge in all sorts of bodily motions. [Compare Hamlet's advice to the Players: 'Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently.'] An inferior flute-player, for instance, when throwing the discus is to be represented, will twist and twirl like the athlete himself; or if he is playing the *Scylla*, he will clutch at the leader of the Chorus. Tragedy, then, is said to be an art of this kind, and to lie under the same condemnation as the earlier actors passed upon the next generation. Thus Mynniscus used to call Callippides 'the Ape,' for overacting his parts; and the actor Pindarus, too, got a similar reputation. And as the later generation is held to be worse

A General Problem: Which is higher, the Epic or Tragedy

The Case against Tragedy

than the earlier among the actors, so the whole art of Tragedy, which is later than the Epic, is considered inferior to it. So we are told that the Epic is addressed to a cultivated audience, which does not need gestures and postures, and Tragedy to an audience that is inferior and does. Accordingly, if Tragedy is a vulgar art, it evidently is the lower form.

The Answer  
is Twofold

1. As to  
gestures

The reply to this argument is twofold. (1) First, then, as to gesture and movement. (a) The censure attaches, not to the art of the poet as such, but to the art of his interpreter. And it touches the interpreter of Epic as well as Tragic poetry; for the epic reciter may likewise overdo the gesticulation—as did Sosistratus; and it may be overdone in a singing-contest—as by Mnasiheus the Opuntian.

(b) In artistic representation, we are not to condemn all bodily movement; otherwise we should have to condemn outright the art of Dancing. What we must object to is the attitudes and gestures of the ignoble—the very objection that was brought against Callippides. The same criticism is passed on certain actors of to-day, who in assuming the role of women are said to lack the bearing of ladies.

(c) It is quite possible for Tragedy to produce its characteristic effect without any movement or gesture, in just the same way as Epic Poetry; for if we merely read a play, its quality becomes evident. Accordingly, if it be true that Tragedy is superior in all other respects, this alleged weakness need not be present.

2. Tragedy  
is more in-  
clusive, com-  
pact, and  
effective

(2) Secondly, one must argue in favor of Tragedy (a) that it contains every element found in Epic Poetry—

since it may have a use even for the epic metre; and that in addition (see page 27, 77) it has no inconsiderable elements of its own in Spectacular effects and in Music—and through the music the characteristic pleasure is distinctly heightened.

Next, (b) the greater vividness of Tragedy is felt when we read the play as well as when we see it acted.

Furthermore, (c) the tragic imitation attains its end in less space. And this may be deemed an advantage, since the concentrated effect is more delightful than one which is long-drawn-out, and so diluted. Consider the result, for example, if one were to lengthen out *Oedipus the King* into the number of lines in the *Iliad*.

And again, (d) the unity of action is less strict in the epic poets, as is shown by the number of subjects for tragedies derived from any one of their works. Consequently, if an epic poet takes a strictly unified story, either he will tell it briefly, and it will seem abrupt, or he will make it conform to the usual heroic scale, and then it will seem thin and watery. By a less strict unity in an epic [even the best] is meant a case in which the story is made up of a plurality of actions. Thus the *Iliad* has many such parts, and the *Odyssey* also; and each of these parts is of some magnitude. Nevertheless these two poems are as perfect in structure as the nature of the Epic will permit; and the action represented in each is as nearly as may be a unit.

If, then, Tragedy is superior to the Epic in all these respects, and particularly in fulfilling its special function as a form of poetry; and if we recall, as we must (see pp. 42–43), that the two forms of serious poetry are to give us, not any chance pleasure, but the definite pleasure we

The Final  
Answer

have mentioned—it is clear that Tragedy, since it attains the poetic end more effectively than the Epic, is the higher form of the two.

Conclusion

So much for Tragedy and Epic Poetry as forms of Poetry in general; for their several kinds and constituent parts, with the number and nature of each; for the causes of success or failure in the two forms; and for critical objections, and the solutions to be employed in rejoinder.

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